Retreat Conferences

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RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR CONVENTS,

BEING

A Series of Exhortations addressed to Religious.

Rev. J. F. Barragan, O. P.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES COX,
OBLATE OF MARY IMMACULATE.

'This is the will of God, your sanctification.'
1 THESS. iv. 3.

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Laudetur Jesus Christus,
Et Maria Immaculata.

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W. J. MILLER, O.M.I.,
Provincial of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

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To

ENGLISH-SPEAKING RELIGIOUS

WHO, BEING CONSECRATED TO GOD,

LABOUR WITH MUCH DEVOTEDNESS IN MANY LANDS

FOR HIS GLORY,

THIS BOOK OF EXHORTATIONS

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.

Rev. J. F. Barragan, O. P.

3958

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RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR CONVENTS.

FIRST EVENING.

I.

OPENING DISCOURSE.—THE RETREAT.

'Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.'—EPH. iv. 23.

YOU have interrupted the ordinary course of your duties and pursuits, in order to enter into a spiritual retreat. The exercises which you will follow, the instructions or conferences which will be given, and the self-examination which you will make, will have for object the renewal of which the Apostle speaks: 'Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.'

If happily your consciences do not reproach you with neglect of duty, or with remissness and tepidity in doing what your state of life demands of you, even so, you should from time to time renew yourselves in the spirit of you religious vocation, in

order to keep yourselves fervent and exact in fulfilling its obligations; and, further, you ought eagerly to desire whatever fresh light or new inspiration your annual retreat may be destined, in the good providence of God, to bring to you. You remember, that our Lord has said: 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill' (St. Matt. v. 6). What happy fruits of sanctification may you not, under this promised blessing of our Lord, expect, if you experience this holy hunger and thirst, if you stimulate your fervent desires of pleasing God more and more?

But is it not a fact that to all of us the annual retreat is more or less a necessity; or, at any rate, that it marks out for us a course of exercises which it is very desirable to follow, perhaps on account of our having to some extent fallen from our first fervour; or because we have taken a low view of our obligations, or have been entrapped in some of the snares and pitfalls which are commonly laid by the many enemies of our soul for our spiritual detriment and ruin? Let us not delude ourselves by fancying that the retreat would be very useful to many, but that our own present condition or dispositions are such that we do not require it. Did not St. Paul, though consumed by Divine charity, exclaim, 'I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet I am not thereby justified.'

When our Lord bade St. John write to the Bishops of the seven Churches in Asia, something was found against five of them, while two (the Bishops of Smyrna and Philadelphia), who were

commended, were cautioned against falling away. If we strive to enter fervently upon this retreat, and if we are really in earnest in seeking to know if our dispositions are all that they ought to be, perhaps before its close we shall be convinced that some things are wanting to us, and even, it may be, that we have transgressed, and need to repent. The message may be conveyed to our conscience: 'I have against thee a few things' (Apoc. ii. 14). Ah, well will it be if there are only a few things, and not many things.

It may be asked why we need a retreat. At the very outset, and as a necessary preliminary to making the retreat well, we ought to be convinced of its utility, so as to appreciate it as it merits to be appreciated.

If it be not apparent that we actually need the retreat on account of some serious falling away from the spirit of true religious, we may answer this inquiry in words from the pen of the great Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine. 'While our soul,' he says, 'is here below in this world, it finds itself engaged in a number of pursuits which engross its attention; it is bound to so many exterior objects, that, little by little, it loses the liberty and ardour of its holiest desires. In this state it is so far deprived of the wings and fire of Divine love that it cannot raise itself towards heaven—where are its life, its strength, and its happiness; so that it has need, from time to time, to struggle to release itself from these worldly cares, in order to take its flight, by its prayers and longings, which are the wings of its love,

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towards the bosom of God, there to find in the delights of contemplation a purer fire and more ardent desires of the Sovereign Good—desires which diminish and are lost in the enjoyment of the goods of this world.'*

Many, many things keep us back from God; we may always approach nearer and nearer to Him. The retreat will help us to do this.

Impressed with the utility, if not the absolute necessity, of retreats, founders of religious congregations have laid down in their Constitutions that several days every year should be devoted to the exercises of a retreat, and that even one day every month, in addition, should be given to the same holy exercises.

I may describe more in detail the benefit of the annual retreat, by saying that it is a special time of enlightenment, of conversion, of generous resolutions, and finally of movements of grace. I will not dwell upon these advantages, but will content myself with a short and categorical development of each.

First of all, as to the enlightenment afforded by the retreat; the things we may learn are, a keener sense of the supernatural, the value of piety and regularity, our indebtedness to God, our own weakness and our dependence on God, the grandeur of our religious vocation, the danger of remissness and tepidity, some insight into the character of our lives and actual faults, also lessons as to our duties, as to our future, and as to the sure way.

* Quoted in Courbon's 'Entretiens Spirituels,' No. xl.

Secondly, in a retreat well made we repent and are converted; and this conversion is spontaneous: it is also genuine, a quality at times somewhat doubtful in our weekly confessions. Our conversion is also effective, and is accompanied by full determination to avoid all danger. Thus, our conversion becomes a source of consolation to ourselves, and produces a sense of satisfaction with our retreat. Let us hope that this retreat may yield this desirable fruit.

Thirdly, as to generous resolutions. These are taken in the light and grace of the retreat, and as a practical result of it, for they correspond with what we have learned concerning our state during the retreat, partly from the instructions, but principally from our self-examination.

Finally, the movements of grace are the affections called forth, an increased desire to labour for the glory of God and for the 'one thing necessary,' a spirit of greater devotedness to the good of our neighbour, a certain fresh impulse towards perfection, an attraction towards piety, recollection and religious life, and a yearning of the soul for God, its Sovereign Good.

Weigh well these advantages offered by the retreat, and strive that they may not be wanting in the annual retreat which you are now commencing.

You know that if grace is to be effectual, you must correspond with it. It rests with you, God helping you, to put yourselves in proper dispositions. I beg of you, therefore, to enter upon this retreat with a firm resolution of making it as well as you can, and of profiting by the lights and graces which

the Holy Spirit may bestow upon you during it. Be not less earnest about it than are those devout secular persons who, retiring from the world for a time, give themselves up with so much fervour to the pious exercises of a retreat. There are religious who fancy that they have not so much need of these exercises as secular persons have, but is this really so?

Persons in the world recognise the dangers to which they are exposed, or the remiss state into which they have fallen; they are alarmed, they seek a remedy, they hope to find it in retreat. But some religious, unfortunately, often consider themselves to be pretty well all that they should be, and they are content to remain as they are. They do not reflect that if they be not all that they should be, that if there be but one unrestrained propensity, but one weakness indulged in, there is everything to fear for their salvation. Therefore, to fancy that they have no need of a retreat is certainly a dangerous delusion. I need not say that it is not exemplary religious who fall into this mistaken notion.

For a religious to be content to remain as she is, and to die without solid virtue; to be full of imperfections, and to make no effort to correct them; to be able to become more perfect, and yet not to wish and strive to become so, is it not very foolishness or lamentable blindness? Again—for we must beware of cowardice and discouragement—to despair of doing that which one has not yet done, is it not to ignore the power of grace and the tenderness of

the Divine compassion? We all can, God helping us, attain the perfection of the holy state to which we are called; and if we fail to do this, the fault will be entirely our own. The annual retreat is, in the good providence of God, one of the helps to our perfection.

I pray then, seeing the rich graces which should result from the retreat, that God may speak to your hearts and consciences, and—what is of equal importance—that you may listen to His voice. Say humbly and earnestly to Him, as Samuel did of old: 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth' (1 Kings iii. 10).

Do we not wish God to speak to us, and do we not want to hear? We cannot, in excuse, say that during the retreat we shall not have time to hear and to attend. Surely we all have something to learn.

'Speak, Lord.' Perhaps we have previously heard like Heli, to whom also God's message had come; but, like Heli too, we have not heeded it. The word that came to him was a command to do his duty, and a warning lest he should neglect it. Such may be the message which we shall receive during this annual retreat. Let us be willing to receive it. If we be true servants of God, and not unmindful ones, as was Heli, we shall hear the heavenly message, the desirable lesson, the consoling truth, the salutary warning. 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.'

Too long, and too often, perhaps, have we listened to worldly and useless conversations, to uncharitable

discourses, to flattering speeches; what have they profited us? Let us now be wise, and open our ears, and our hearts too, to the voice of God.

'Speak, Lord.' Yes, speak, O Lord; speak in the depths of our hearts, speak distinctly to our consciences. Every word of Thine is a grace, a mercy, a token of love and compassion, a word of wisdom and truth, to be reflected upon, treasured up, and acted upon; for Thy Apostle says: 'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only' (St. James i. 22).

What heavenly message, what words to arrest attention, what moving appeal to touch your hearts, may be vouchsafed to you during this retreat? To many, before now, has come the message, 'Be converted and live' (Ez. xviii. 23); for even the chosen servants of God have proved faithless. Many of God's elect are to reach the heavenly kingdom, not by the way of innocence, but by that of repentance. At one time or another of their lives, how many of those who are now devout strayed in the ways of evil, known, perhaps, only to God and their own troubled consciences. They were the victims of some weakness or delusion, and they remained in their misery until they heard the message of mercy, and felt grace once more struggling for the mastery in their souls. God appealed to the faithless Jews, saying: 'What iniquity have your fathers found in Me that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity? . . . Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God' (Jer. ii. 5, 19). These faithless servants of God heard some such appeal, and in sorrow and

remorse they turned back to God, to love Him, after their repentance, more sincerely and more perseveringly than before their fall.

To all will come the gracious invitation: 'Learn of Me' (St. Matt. xi. 29); for our Lord has constituted Himself a Guide and a Model for all His followers. He is that perfect Model whom religious should keep ever before them; again and again must they raise their eyes to our Lord to learn of Him how to love God, how to fulfil their end in life, how to practise humility, meekness, charity, patience, obedience, and self-denial. During the retreat you will meditate upon the forcible lessons which our Lord's words and life teach, and you will strive to learn them with renewed zest and determination, that you may advance further in the path of perfection in pursuance of your beautiful vocation.

To all also will come this other gracious invitation: 'Follow Me' (St. Matt. viii. 22, xvi. 24); that is, Be true to your vocation. Our Lord is now your only Master; His will must ever be the law of your lives. You must not shrink from whatever labour, care, or suffering your religious life may demand of you. At the voice of our Saviour the Apostles left all things; but it was not that they might possess in this world honour, pleasures, or riches; they left all things to follow their Lord in poverty, labour, persecution, sufferings, and death. You, too, must take up your cross daily and follow your Lord. This needs fortitude and self-denial. Have you shrunk from the Cross? Have you followed the dictates of self-love, of sloth, or of the

world? Who has been your real master? Now in this retreat you will turn to our Lord, and say: 'Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou shalt go' (St. Matt. viii. 19), and you will add, with the spouse in the Canticles: 'Draw me: we will run after Thee to the odour of Thy ointments' (Cant. i. 3).

Finally, you will be assured, after having made a good retreat, that God has accepted your repentance, and that He holds out to you every help necessary to enable you to persevere in a dutiful and fervent religious life. Our Lord will say to you during the retreat: 'Lovest thou Me?' and you will be able, at its close, to reply with St. Peter: 'Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee' (St. John xxi. 16). What will then remain for you to do but to abide in His love? This is His desire and command; let it be also your desire and firm resolve.

Let me be assured that you are resolved, with the blessing and grace of God, to turn the retreat to practical account. Your prayers and recollectedness, your meditations and pious reading, your silence and your self-examination, and your attention to the conferences, will be directed to this end. If the retreat does not teach you anything new, it will yet be a means of reminding you of many truths or duties of your state which you should reflect upon; so, in this sense, it will afford enlightenment. During it you will discover your faults and shortcomings, and these you are fully determined to repent of and correct; therefore it will be a time of conversion. The retreat, if well made, will perhaps

convince you of some needed improvement, and this you will resolve, with God's help, to effect; so it will be an occasion of generous resolutions. And, finally, you know how sluggish even religious sometimes are in doing good, how tied down to earthly things, and often how ungenerous with God; but you will pray God for His grace to move your hearts, to bring its influence to bear upon your future lives, and this grace will not be denied you; so the retreat will be for you an occasion of the movements of grace. God grant that all this may be so!

Let me say just another word in conclusion. It is this: If, in the course of instructions which I give in this retreat, any error should creep in, the error, like the voice, will be mine—it will come of human ignorance; but if any words of mine speak to your consciences so as to cause you to reflect upon any neglect of duty, to move you to sorrow for past short-comings, to upbraid you with infidelity in following your holy calling, to warn you of danger, to strike you with the unworthiness of any of your proceedings, or to incite you to fervour, and inspire you with greater respect for your religious obligations, then the words will verily be to you as the voice of God, and I say to you: Heed them and reverence them as such, for they proceed from the teaching of faith and religion, and they are, in such a case, intended by God for your special benefit. 'To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

I ask you, in your meditation to-morrow morning, to take three considerations. The first, God's good-

ness in giving you time to make this annual retreat. The second, the object of a retreat, and the advantages to be derived from it, if made well. And the third, your need of attending to God's inspirations and warnings.

These considerations should elicit affections of gratitude, of appreciation of God's designs, and of desire to listen to God speaking to you, and they should lead you to make good resolutions to spend the time of this retreat as profitably as possible.

Nothing will succeed without prayer. Pray, then, much and fervently; consecrate the retreat and its fruits to the Sacred Heart, and put yourselves under the special care of the Blessed Virgin, of St. Joseph, of your Guardian Angel, and of your holy Patrons.

FIRST DAY.

II.

RELIGIOUS PROFESSION.

'I therefore . . . beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called.'—EPH. iv. 1.

YOUR vocation to religion is an inestimable grace. The words of our Divine Lord to His Apostles may be applied also to you: 'I have chosen you out of the world' (St. John xv. 19). I invite you to consider this morning the meaning of what you did when, following your vocation, you consecrated yourselves to God by your religious profession.

What is the religious profession? Let us see what it is. In the first place we must answer the question by declaring that the religious profession is the perfect accomplishment of man's most essential duty.

In common with all things created by God, you belong to God, and have been made by Him for Himself; that is, to render Him your entire homage. Thus, all you are and have—your body, soul, mind, liberty, health, possessions, talents, and time, your

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life itself—are all from Him, and should be for Him. 'Render, therefore, . . . to God the things that are God's' (St. Matt. xxii. 21). 'What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He hath rendered to me?' (Psa. cxv. 12). You are under a lasting obligation to love God with all your mind, with all your heart, and with all your strength. You know this precept well, but who is there that fully accomplishes the just, reasonable, necessary, and sublime duty which it enjoins? Let me answer this question: It is the good religious, and she does it by her profession. A professed religious may say: I am no longer my own; I belong now to God. Now I offer Him not only the fruit of the tree, but also the very tree itself, with all the fruit which it may ever bring forth. I have no part now with the world, nor do I wish ever to belong to it or to serve it again. I have given all things to Him from whom I have received them. For God's sake I have renounced all my possessions, and to Him I have consecrated myself, body and soul, to be henceforward a victim ever living and ever immolated.

As to pleasures, I renounce not only all those which are unlawful, but even such as are allowable. As to my liberty, henceforward it shall belong to my superiors, who hold in my regard the place of God, to dispose of it. I vow to God poverty, chastity, obedience.

The professed religious may then reason thus: Since I wish to keep nothing back, may I not hope that this offering of myself to God will be pleasing in His sight? If I have given Him myself and all

that I possess, as I have no more to give, He cannot ask for more. What a consoling thought and reasoning, and what a happy sacrifice!

But, O fickle mortal, will you go back of your word? Will you ever withdraw any portion of the holocaust? 'I am the Lord,' we read in Isaias, 'that love judgment and hate robbery in a holocaust' (Isa. lxi. 8). Would it not be a sacrilege to take back what has been so solemnly and so sacredly consecrated to God? You must remember that by your profession you become His property—His very own.

What will you say? In your generosity and fervour you will exclaim: Ah, no, my God, I will never be guilty of such perfidious and sacrilegious conduct. Far from withdrawing any part of the sacrifice, I will rather renew the holocaust day by day; and at the conclusion of my retreat I will renew my consecration to Thee solemnly, joyfully, fully. That I belong to God shall be my lifelong glory and consolation, just as I hope that it will fill me with comfort at the hour of my death.

Such, indeed, should be your sentiments. Beg, then, of God to dispose of you as of His own property, and not to await the indication of your will. He may do this by a twofold right: first, because you are His, and, secondly, because you place yourselves wholly at His disposal.

Ask of God the grace to be good religious, that is, entirely devoted to Him and His interests, even as He deigns so graciously and lovingly to provide for you and your interests. Your only ambition, as it

would indeed be the greatest source of your consolation, should be to be for ever and wholly God's. He has made you for Himself, and by your religious profession you have dedicated yourselves to Him, to belong entirely to Him.

Let us see again what the religious profession is. It is, in the second place, a solemn renewal of your baptism.

God has made you Christians; what a happiness for you! Never cease to praise and thank God for having conferred this inestimable grace upon you. There are millions in the world who have not received it. You received it as infants without knowing why; the baptismal promises were made for you without your knowing what was promised; and perhaps since then, until your religious profession, you took but little care to keep those promises; and it might even be questioned if you ever until then really understood what they required you to be and to do.

But upon the day of your religious profession you took upon yourselves the obligations of a Christian in all their extent. You did this by choice, with full reflection, with loving respect for those obligations, and with a firm resolve and desire to fulfil them. You then made an act of renouncement, and an act of consecration and entire fealty.

You renounced the devil and the world, with their works, pomps, and maxims: 'I do renounce them.' You enrolled yourselves under the standard of Jesus Christ, taking Him to be your only Chief, your only Master, and your only Model. Moreover, not

content to bind yourselves to obey only His precepts, at your profession you bound yourselves to follow also His counsels; for you vowed to Him to live and die poor, chaste, and obedient like Him, and you accepted the holy rule of your institute as the guide of your entire conduct.

Looking back upon your profession, in the light of what we have been considering, do you not recognise that your offering to God in that solemn act was as a holocaust? Should you, then, be astonished at learning the view taken of it by Saints, namely, that by the religious profession your sins were all pardoned, not only as to their guilt, but even as to their punishment? Hence, it was for you, according to this teaching, like a second baptism.

As you became by it the property of Jesus Christ in a twofold sense—that is, by grace and by choice, by manifold necessity and by your own free act—I ask you to apply to yourselves the exhortation which might appropriately be addressed to an adult just baptized: 'Take care not to sully the white robe in which you have been clothed; take care not to lose your innocence. Let there not appear in you any more anything which might reveal that the "old man" which you have cast off is still in your heart. Your vows are inscribed in the very heavens; for you have not sworn to man, but to God. Much better would it have been for you never to have made those solemn promises, than to have made them only to break them and disregard them.'

Remember, then, well what you did when you made your profession; take care not to forget your

obligations; take care not to fall from your first fervour. Religious orders and institutes sprang up in the Church when Christians had become remiss; take heed lest you become remiss, for it might appear that you are not even true and sincere Christians. If ordinary Christians must walk without blemish, what must religious do? The psalmist says: 'Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle? or who shall rest in Thy holy hill? He that walketh without blemish and worketh justice' (Psa. xiv. 1, 2). This is the standard of living to which you are invited to aspire. Your faults and your frailty may keep you back, but you must ever press forward.

But do not go backwards; take care not to fall into the condition of bad religious, a condition more dangerous than that of a secular person who falls from a less sublime vocation. As there are places reserved in heaven for good religious, high above those destined for ordinary Christians, so are there, in the fiery abyss of punishment, deeper depths of infamy and pain prepared for the miserable religious, who defile the holy state of religion by mortal sin, and by the breaking of their vows, if they die without true repentance—deeper depths than shall be allotted to bad Christians, whose graces were less, and who had not been so enlightened and favoured as they.

Let us see, lastly, what the religious profession is. It is, in the third place, an irrevocable alliance between God and His creature.

God promises me life everlasting, His eternity, the everlasting possession of Himself; and I, having

given Him myself, promise Him also my everlasting homage and duty. So might a religious say at her profession. Yes, she consecrated to God, not only her whole being, but also her entire existence; so, should she have a century to live, or were it even an eternity, it should, all the same, be for God; she will always be God's, for so she has sworn.

From that time forward, neither health nor sickness, neither youth nor decaying years, neither consolation nor trial, nothing, should ever separate her from God. She might say with Jephte (Judges xi. 35): 'I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I can do no other thing.' At her profession she gave herself irrevocably to God; she must keep her vow.

But how shall she keep it? It may seem hard to flesh and blood, and to human inconstancy. The religious, however, does not count upon her own strength, but upon help from on high. Her vocation was from God, and God will enable her to be faithful to it.

When David described the power of God in the creation, he did not forget to show that the stability of creation, comprising as it does elements so weak and so conflicting, comes also from God: 'He spoke, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created: He hath established them for ever, and for ages of ages; He hath made a decree, and it shall not pass away' (Psa. cxlviii. 5, 6). The same Divine power will sustain the religious, notwithstanding her natural weakness and inconstancy. Let such be your trust and confidence, as it should also be your consolation.

And now one word about the merit and gain resulting from the sacrifice which, at your profession, you as religious made of yourselves and of your lives to God. You will have the merit of all the good embraced in that act; the merit of all your days and years spent in the service of God; the merit of the trials consequent upon your having entered religion—even of those trials to which you thereby generously exposed yourselves, and which you were willing to endure, but which it may happen you will not actually experience. Being now professed religious, consecrated to God and working only for Him, you find comfort in the thought that you are dealing with God, and that you look to Him for your recompense. Everything you do for Him will be a source of gain to you. You find comfort also in the thought that the sacred engagements which you have contracted are of so sublime a character that they can be made only to God; but God is worthy to receive such engagements at your hands, and you, on your part, undertake them without risking anything. For is not God full of interest in you, full of goodness and compassion? He is your Master, liberal and all-powerful, the complete and universal Master of your whole being; yet, withal, a Master who does not ask anything of you, if it be not that He may make you a return and a recompense; a Master who never commands you to do anything which He is not ready Himself to help you to accomplish; a Master, lastly, who only exposes you to the strife in order that He may give you the crown. It is therefore you who will in

every case be the gainers in all you do in His holy service in religion.

What consolation, then, and what joy and assurance, your religious profession should afford you! You have by it consecrated yourselves to God, and you are His. With St. Paul, you may say: 'I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him' (2 Tim. i. 12). If you fail in your vocation, it will not be God's fault, but yours.

Having thus far dwelt upon what your religious profession signified,* namely, an undertaking to fulfil the essential duty of homage and obedience to God; a solemn renewal of your baptismal promises, by which you became even as holocausts to God; and, finally, a bond, an alliance, not to be broken throughout the whole course of your lives, by which you gave yourselves to God, while He, as it were, gave an undertaking to take you and treat you as His own—having, I say, dwelt upon this meaning and nature of your religious profession, I ask you now what views you proposed to yourselves when you embraced it, and what the rest of the faithful expect to meet with in religious consecrated to God.

These practical reflections should impress you with the necessity of living up to your profession; that is, of being imbued with the spirit of true religious, and of manifesting this spirit in your exterior conduct.

When you embraced the religious life, you had

* Following Père Judde, S.J. (tome iii.).

something more in view than to put on the habit, or (as it is termed) to take the veil, to receive the name of Sister, and to live in a convent. Such things had, no doubt, their attraction for you. But what was the further motive? Was it not to consecrate your whole lives in a special manner to God; or to atone for your sins committed in the world; or to become victims of expiation for the world's sinfulness and ingratitude to God; or to render your salvation more secure; or, finally, to devote your lives to good works under the fostering care of religion? Such noble ends cannot, however, be accomplished unless you enter with fervour into the spirit of your holy vocation. If such laudable motives led you to embrace the religious life, if they still persevere, they should also instigate you to strive ever to be fervent religious. How great your first fervour was! It is quite refreshing and inspiriting to recall it. But now, after so many years spent in religion, are you still fervent?

You know that the longer a soldier serves, the more disciplined and soldierly he becomes. So should it be with religious. The longer you are in religion, the more you should love your holy vocation, and adopt and conform your lives to religious discipline. You know, too, that it is an essential duty of your state ever to tend to perfection by the observance of your vows and rule.

Let me ask you, in view of this obligation, what should be thought if any are to be found who, though long in religion, are more like seculars than religious; any to whom a great deal of the rule is a

dead letter; any who have no love of discipline or regularity; any who cannot be brought to fulfil their duty except by a great deal of humouring and coaxing; any who neglect their exercises of piety, as if —this is only a supposition—they imagine that they have enough of the spirit of union with God, and of the unction of piety, without them?

Let us suppose that a fervent young religious is associated with any such as these. Do they perhaps discourage exactitude and fidelity in observing the rule? do they try to carry the fervent young religious along the stream with themselves? do they, by their baneful influence and example, if not by their outspoken advice, undo the work of years of religious training, and cause the dissipation of fruits of special graces, meritorious for the fervent young religious, and of incalculable value to her Institute and to the Church?

Let us, however, console ourselves by supposing that the young religious is serious about her vocation; that she is strong in principle and firm of resolve; that she values her rule, and clings to the advantages which the religious life offers; that she believes she has yet much to do to reach the perfection to which she is called; and, finally, that she is conscious of the nature of her obligations, and fears to be unfaithful. This, happily, should prove a check to the older but less perfect religious. We can hardly believe that the older religious would still strive to undermine the good already achieved, and to stay further progress in the younger religious; but if she were to do so, what an

account she would have to give of such scandalous conduct!

We will now leave these painful suppositions, and let me, as a last matter for your consideration, ask you what the ordinary faithful expect you to be.

They know that, as religious, you are in a special way consecrated to God; that you have left the world and your relations, to put on the garb of God's sworn servants, and the veil of the holy spouses of Christ. They reckon that your vocation has something sublime about it; that you have ceased to be common mortals, since you have enlisted in, or rather been called to, so exalted a service. What, then, do they expect you to be? They expect you to be pious, given to prayer, prudent and reserved in your manner, avoiding worldliness and dissipation, meek and humble of heart, gentle and charitable; they expect your lives to be in keeping with your profession. They know that you are bound, not only by the holy vows of religion, but also by your rules and by community discipline. Perhaps it may come to their knowledge that—whether through human respect or through some other fault—you are guilty sometimes of breaches of your rules and of this wise community discipline. If so, do not imagine, because they conceal it from you, that good Catholics are not thereby scandalized. Your conduct when away from your convent, is, I am sure, always edifying. I scarcely need to remind you that when you do go forth from your convent you must carry the spirit and discipline of good religious with you. Both out

of your convent as well as in it, you must act up to your profession.

Do not seek to curry favour with secular persons by any compromise of your religious character and obligations. You have One to please and One to serve—that is, your heavenly Spouse. No matter how far your various duties may seem to carry you away, and cause you distraction, you have always in the sanctuary of your heart a tabernacle in which your Spouse reposes, and where heart to heart you entertain Him. Remember the words of David: 'As the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters, as the eyes of the hand-maid are on the hands of her mistress: so are our eyes unto the Lord our God' (Psa. cxxii. 2). Your first thought and motive must be to please God. Although you do not seek commendation from men, but from God, be careful so to act that you may be spoken of as religious in your lives, zealous in your works, and exemplary in your conduct. Strive ever to carry out what your profession demands of you, and what you proposed to yourselves when entering religion; you will not then disappoint devout seculars in their lawful expectations regarding the character of your lives.

In conclusion, let me say that, being religious, you must beware of becoming seculars. Each state of life is different; yet, just as some very pious seculars become almost like religious, so do some lax religious become very like seculars. If you love to associate with seculars, if you find more pleasure in spending your time of relaxation with them than

with your sisters in religion, if you place yourselves unnecessarily under obligations to seculars, if you imitate them in your conversation and ways—then, I say, religious as you are, you will become, in spirit and life, like seculars. You surely do not wish this: this would indeed be deteriorating.

No, you will thank God that you have been called to religion. You recognise how solemn your obligations are; you will strive to be faithful to them. You will love your holy and privileged vocation, and you will endeavour to be good religious—that is, to be religious not only by your profession, but also by your interior spirit, by your manner of acting, and by the edification of your lives.

'I therefore,' says St. Paul, 'beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called.' God helping you, you are determined to do this.

III.

HOLY POVERTY.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'—ST. MATT. v. 3.

MUCH as the goods and wealth of this world are the object of men's desire and attachment, religious hold that it is by a special and highly-privileged vocation that they have been called to renounce them: they have vowed poverty. Although by this vow they have renounced worldly possessions, they have not, however, so stamped out the inclinations of the 'old man' within them that poor human nature may not still lean towards them. Religious, by such inclination, may be led in different ways to offend more or less grievously against their vow. Having taken the vow, they are strictly bound by it, according to the rules and constitutions of their society, and they must so watch over their inclinations and manner of acting as to avoid every kind of breach of their vow. In the Book of Numbers we read: 'If any man make a vow to the Lord, or bind himself by an oath, he shall not make his word void, but shall fulfil all that he promised' (xxx. 3). And Solomon says:

'It is much better not to vow, than after a vow not to perform the things promised' (Eccles. v. 4).

It was our Divine Lord who sanctified and consecrated by His own life the state of poverty, and we should learn to esteem and love it on His account. It should so rise and so stand in our eyes as to appear an exalted condition. There could not possibly be a nobler model for our imitation than our Lord; the nearer we approach Him in our imitation, the more perfect we shall become. We shall not, however, make any progress in this direction unless we love what He loved and hate what He hated. But what lesson does His life give? By His words and conduct He has warned us against riches. His words are: 'Amen, I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven' (St. Matt. xix. 23); 'Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation' (St. Luke vi. 24).

If the disciple must not be greater than the master, what shall we say when we consider our Lord's practice of poverty? His birthplace was the refuge of the outcast and homeless, His first experiences the harshest, in the manger of a wretched stable. The experiences which followed were as bitter during the journeyings to and from Egypt and in that land of exile, accompanied as they were by terrible privations. Even at Nazareth His was a hard lot, and during His missionary expeditions what privations and discomfort He endured! How often the dark, still nights saw Him houseless in retired spots among the hills! 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath

not where to lay His head.' Such were His words, but they were not uttered as a complaint. He cast in His lot, not with the rich, but with the poor; even His very clothing was sacrificed upon the altar of poverty when He gave His life for man's salvation.

Such a grandeur and nobility did our Lord communicate to the state of poverty, that it became dear to His followers. We know how the first Christians sold their property, and lived upon the common fund. We have read of the severe lives of poverty led by the anchorites and many of the Saints of the early centuries of the Christian era, and by many also of succeeding centuries. Then, the Church has her special adornment of poverty in the marvellous practice of that virtue by St. Francis, who styled poverty his queen. St. Ignatius wished poverty to be to his sons as a mother. Poverty is the distinguishing mark of nearly all the religious Orders in the Church, and the more closely these Orders cling to the practice of it, the greater vitality they manifest, and the better they maintain themselves in the fervour of their calling in the Church.

We know from our Lord's teaching how necessary poverty is to our perfection, for He said upon an occasion: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me' (St. Matt. xix. 21).

If we look for reasons why poverty should exercise such influence upon religious perfection, we discover that it disengages the mind and affections from love of riches and possessions, and of worldly ease, com-

fort, and indulgence, and from one of the most potent factors in worldly greatness—all which things are a great obstacle to everything spiritual. We discover that, whereas riches fill men with a spirit of attachment to the world, binding them to commerce, speculation, worldly enterprise and worldly society, all which are a hindrance to religiousness, poverty, on the other hand, disengages the heart from all this, tames the proud spirit of man, frees the mind from worldly care, and trains the character to self-denial; thus disposing man to virtue, and opening the soul to those rich and special graces which are found in fervent religious life. We discover, too, that the state of voluntary poverty has this holy attraction, that it has been blessed by our Lord in a special way, both by His own choice of it and by reason of the rewards which He has promised to those who embrace it. 'Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God' (St. Luke vi. 20). 'Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My Name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting' (St. Matt. xix. 29). No wonder that the desire of securing these incomparable blessings should have led so many to embrace voluntary poverty, and to cast in their lot with those who practise this evangelical counsel. This is the step which you also have taken; but if you have forsaken all, it is to gain all. You may say in the words of the psalm: 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance . . . it is Thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me' (xv. 5).

Let me now put before you in a very few words the nature of your obligation by reason of the vow of poverty.

By your vow you have taken a definite step under a most solemn obligation of observing poverty during your whole life. Your vow of poverty makes it unlawful for you so to dispose, by your own will and act, of any temporal thing of estimable value, as though you had the use or disposal of it, independently of the will of your superior. What is chiefly contrary to your vow is the arbitrary use and disposal of things. In order to deal with temporal goods, without any breach of your vow, the permission of your rules or of your superior is necessary. The permission of your superior may, according to circumstances, be express, tacit, or presumed. Any act which would be of the nature of an act of proprietorship, dealing with things as though they were absolutely your own, would be directly against the vow. The gravity of the sin would depend upon the value of the matter dealt with.

It may be well to instance a few cases in which the vow of poverty would be violated. But please bear in mind that there are cases in which, when unable at the moment to obtain express permission, it would be quite right to presume permission—for instance, if you were quite sure that the superior would give the permission.

You would violate the vow by receiving anything for yourself without your superior's knowledge or consent; by receiving in this way presents of even useful articles, or little ornaments for your room, or

books, or sums of money; even, where no kind of permission or toleration exists for it, by taking food from friends in their houses, or accepting presents of that kind;* by taking such presents and keeping them in your room.

The vow of poverty would also be violated by your giving away, or alienating, anything from your community; by your borrowing or lending. To constitute a mortal sin in the cases of borrowing or lending, the matter, or amount, would require to be of much greater value than in the case of actually giving anything away.

The vow could also be violated by your acting contrary to the will of your superior, in administering the goods of your community, and by your causing or allowing loss by your careless custody of such goods. The vow could also be violated by your ordering articles of clothing without the superior's permission; also by your keeping money without permission, even though not belonging to the community.

It is possible that sometimes religious use their own discretion first, and then mention the matter afterwards to their superior. They pretend that they can presume permission when really there is no proper justification for doing so, and then, when it is too late for the superior to exercise any authority over what has been done, tell her what has occurred. As a system, this is contrary to the vow. It would also be contrary to the vow if you were to

* 'Comedere et bibere, non solum ex rebus monasterii, sed etiam apud amicum, sine licentia.'—Lehmkuhl, vol. i., No. 528, 2.

get externs to make purchases for you and upon your authority, and then afterwards to get the matter arranged with your superior.

To use money received for a certain purpose for any other object, or to expend upon the approved object more money than intended by your superior without first consulting her, would ordinarily be against your vow, unless the peculiar circumstances of the case warranted your supposing her permission. You would also offend against poverty by taking upon yourselves any money risk or debt without proper authorization.

Lastly, you might consider if there are occasions when you expend too much money quite unnecessarily. This may occur, perhaps, when you get permission to visit another convent, or at other times when you are intrusted with money.

I instance these cases only to illustrate the doctrine bearing upon the vow, and not because I doubt your attachment to voluntary poverty and your faithful fulfilment of its requirements.

It is evident that by your vow you have circumvented yourselves; you have given up to God your freedom in the use of this world's goods. I cannot suppose it possible that you regret the choice and the sacrifice which you have so generously made, or that you wish to make it unreal, or that you would give an unlawful interpretation to the words of St. Paul, 'As having nothing, and possessing all things' (2 Cor. vi. 10). What, indeed, should be said of a religious who would so plan everything as never to feel her vow? What if a religious were to

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collect into her room everything which could make it comfortable, and possibly much more commodious and comfortable than her room would have been elsewhere, if she had never embraced the state of poverty? What if she have superfluous clothing, and everything of the best? What if she ever seek permissions and exemptions, so as to escape every little inconvenience or privation? What if she surround herself for her amusement with various kinds of expensive novelties, which will, of course, soon cease to be novelties, and will then be cast aside? What if she be expensive in her habits, and cause outlay which is uncalled for, and which the community can ill afford? What if she complain that the diet is not good enough, when everything is well provided? Ah, what an unreal thing the poverty of such a religious would be!

I ask if there would not be an unbecomingness in such conduct in a religious who has made the vow of poverty.* I ask if such a religious could be said to love poverty. I ask if her superior could look approvingly upon such conduct. I ask, finally, if a religious who acts in such a way would not do well to adopt a more perfect way of acting.

And now let me invite you to dispose yourselves (as indeed you ought) to observe your vow by filling your minds and hearts with the spirit of poverty,

* Father Humphrey, S.J., in his work 'Elements of Religious Life' (p. 133), says: 'His vow is not only not to use goods without leave of his superior, but also to observe *the state of a poor man*, and not to make expenses which do not beseem poor men.'

with respect and love of this sublime virtue. Strive to manifest your love of holy poverty by your great exactitude in its observance. Your love of poverty will appear in your dress, in your ways, in your surroundings. Let the poverty of Christ manifest itself in you. Ask yourselves in what way and how far you show your love of it, and pray fervently for the grace to fulfil exactly all your obligations with regard to your vow.

Is it possible that any religious among you may thoughtlessly have fallen into ways or adopted practices which, if not positively and gravely opposed to the vow itself, may yet leave some room for doubt about it, or be at any rate contrary to the spirit of poverty? You will not, however, content yourselves with stopping just within the limits of a breach of your vow; that would not show much love of the poverty of Christ, seeing how amply, and even comfortably, you are provided for. But let me ask you to use discretion, and practise self-denial in your various expenses and in supplying your many wants. Seek not only the reward of not having broken your vow, but also the recompense of having been careful and exact in observing it, and in striving to walk in the steps of your Divine Lord and of those many glorious Saints of the Church who have left you such admirable examples of their love of poverty. What room there is for generous action in this matter! Be assured, too, that your observance of poverty is not only a question of poverty itself, but also a question of progress in religious perfection. Look upon it seriously in this light.

At the close of the retreat you will kneel once more before the altar to renew before our Blessed Lord your solemn obligations. Once more you will pronounce the words of your consecration to poverty. Your heart has been converted from all attachment to the dross of this world—an attachment which leaves so many men empty of true riches when they most need them; for when men leave this world they quit for ever their worldly possessions, and only the priceless treasure of grace will purchase the heavenly kingdom. Led by your holy vocation, you have sought the path of other riches; you have embraced the wisdom of the Gospel, and God is your portion. With joy and thankfulness, then, you will once more renew solemnly your vow binding you to holy poverty.

Let me invite you to prepare yourselves for that religious act by examining how you have observed this vow up to the present, and by exciting yourselves to a fervent and generous determination to keep your troth unbroken. Be resolved to fulfil all the obligations of the vow of poverty with affection and fidelity to the end of your lives. My prayer for you is that God may give you the grace to do this, that He may enrich you with spiritual blessings, and reward your fidelity to poverty according to our Lord's promise, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

IV.

SIN IN A RELIGIOUS.

'If My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne it . . . but thou!'—PSA. liv. 13, 14.

THE faith we prize so dearly teaches us that our Divine Lord came, in His mercy, into the world to be the Lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world. He Himself, of the very necessity of His Divine nature, was without sin, and hated sin with that essential hatred which He could not but bear towards everything opposed to God's sovereignty and holiness.

If all God's servants are invited to embrace holiness of life, and to 'flee from sin as from the face of a serpent' (Ecclus. xxi. 2), with what great urgency is not this demanded and expected of you, who are the spouses of Christ, and who should therefore rejoice when He is glorified, and suffer when He meets with dishonour! You are, and you thank God for it, called away from the world to a condition of greater holiness, in which, at any rate, you must ever tend to perfection. You have accepted for your rule of life a code of regulations which supposes a special love of God and complete devoted-

ness to His holy service. You wear a habit which ever reminds you, and signifies to those who see you, that you are consecrated to God. You have received, both in your vocation and since you entered the religious life, unequivocal tokens of God's special love of you and providence over you. You are associated with that vast and mighty army of religious men and women spread over the Church of God, who have put on the armour of Christ, to do battle with sin and with the Wicked One, and to offer up to God, as from many glorious choirs, an unceasing chant of fervent prayer and praise. What a privileged vocation! Does it not entail the obligation of living holily all your days? How lamentable, then, it would be if a religious were to violate this strict obligation! This is what we are going to consider this evening. Alas for human frailty! Even holy religious have at times fallen. I do not pretend that any of you have fallen into grievous sin; but the consideration of such a fall should fill you with a wholesome fear, and should also incite you to ardour in the pursuit of your sanctification.

The psalmist says: 'Man when he was in honour did not understand' (xlviii. 13). The religious falls from grace; and whereas she was called to edify her sisters, and to move the faithful to piety by her example, and even to win sinners by her prayers and good advice, lo! she herself now needs conversion. She was in honour, but she did not understand. What are the things which she, seemingly, has not understood? She has not understood God's love of her, nor what return she owed; she has not

rightly or fully understood the mystery of Calvary, and at what a price the grace and favour and friendship of God have been obtained ; she has not understood the exaltedness of her own condition, and what it demanded of her ; she has not understood the greatness of her guilt, the depth of her fall, and the extent of her spiritual degradation. 'Man when he was in honour did not understand.' The religious has not understood the graces which she has despised, the merits which she has dissipated, and the punishment which she has incurred. She has grieved the Holy Spirit ; she has wounded the Sacred Heart—even crucified to herself once more the Son of God, and made a mockery of Him (Heb. vi. 6) ; she has despised the love of Mary ; she has abandoned the company of all the Blessed ; she has sold her birthright for a mess of pottage ; she has blotted heaven out of her vision ; she has turned into the broad way ; she has cast in her lot with the wicked ; she has attired herself in the garment of the reprobate ; she has gone over to the enemy and become the slave of Satan. God, therefore, whose love was her richest treasure, being driven forth, retires from her, saying : 'I have forsaken My house, I have left My inheritance, I have given My dear soul into the hand of her enemies' (Jer. xii. 7). 'Man when he was in honour did not understand.' O spouse of Jesus Christ, must it be said of you that you have not understood ?

Do you forget that you have been consecrated to God ? Your hand has not been given in any worldly

marriage, but the Divine Majesty has invited you to the holy espousals of virgins dedicated to Himself. Do you forget how often you are privileged to enjoy the Eucharistic union? Has it made no impression upon you that you come so often before the Blessed Sacrament, and assist daily at the Holy Mass? Alas, if you have not understood! Where is the holiness of life, where the zeal for the Divine honour, where the piety, where the sincere religiousness, which your calling demands and expects in you? What if you have neglected this zeal and piety? What if your soul be stained by mortal sin? for such neglect is likely sooner or later to lead to this fatal precipice. Oh, in such a case, what a dereliction of duty, what an abandonment of principle, what sad infidelity, what a disastrous calamity! Perhaps the evil will not be confined to the religious herself; she may even become as a plague-spot in the community!

Conceive, if you can, a more lamentable fall. Who should be so devout, who so devoted to God, who so ready to be sacrificed upon the altar of Divine charity, as the spouse of Christ? But what if she has committed mortal sin? 'If My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne it . . . but thou!' With what feelings of horror should not such a spectacle inspire you! Alas if, having fallen, one fall should lead to a second and a third fall! But, worse than all, what if these falls end in the crime of sacrilege? O inexcusable! O desperate wickedness, surpassing every other! Let me say that mortal sin in the soul of the consecrated spouse

of Christ is the 'abomination of desolation in the holy place.'

Although I put these thoughts before you about mortal sin, I am very far from thinking it probable that the condition of any religious among you is such that she needs to consider them, except it be as a point of meditation, and except it be to inspire her mind with a horror of mortal sin, and with a firm determination, by God's grace, to avoid every danger of falling into it. I speak of danger because there is always danger, and it would be delusion to think otherwise. We know how sometimes we feel strong and resolute; but, alas! sometimes we are weak. The foe awaits his opportunity; are we always ready for him? We know, too, that we are exposed to be set upon by many enemies, and that we ourselves are, by nature, frail and prone to evil. A serious indiscretion, a neglect of precautions, a yielding to dangerous curiosity, human respect, the exposing of ourselves to fall, jealousy, envy, hatred, ambition, flattery—these and many other causes may lead to a fatal fall. 'He that loves the danger shall perish in it.' Your religious grace will not save you if you wantonly expose yourselves to danger.

Danger of one kind or another may arise from the power of your passions or proclivities, from shiftiness or sloth of character; it may meet you in the house or in the school, in the books you read or in the objects you see; it may surprise you in conversation or correspondence; it may arise from immortification or curiosity, from the intrigues of friends or the snares of foes; it may beset you when alone or

when in the crowd, in the broad daylight or in the night-time, when in recreation, and even when at prayer. Man's life is truly a warfare; the life of a religious is not free from some daily contest. Danger is on every side; it is to be found both within us and without us. Therefore does St. Paul warn all of us, saying: 'He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor. x. 12).

You have now considered the subject of mortal sin and the dangers of it sufficiently to put yourselves well on your guard against so great and fatal an evil. Direct your thoughts now to venial sin.

Although, thank God, you have not fallen into grievous sin, is it not possible that, in other matters less grievous, yet of serious consequence, you may have offended God? If human frailty has in any such way manifested itself in you, place yourselves face to face with it in this retreat.

If you have not sinned mortally, yet you have perhaps offended by some known deliberate venial sin, and this sin has been repeated, and you may even have committed it so frequently that it may be called your habitual sin, though venial. Is it, alas! even possible that some of your conduct has been quite unworthy of your religious character and vocation, even though you have not fallen thereby into mortal sin?

I invite you to examine yourselves carefully on these two points. If you neglect to do this, it is very likely that you will not derive that benefit from the retreat which is desirable. For now is the time, during these days of recollection, in which you

should examine your short-comings. Within the fleshy walls of your hearts there may be hidden secret faults which render you unworthy of your calling, or which impede your perfection—if they do not, as a matter of fact, threaten to lead you down the inclined plane of evil. Pierce through those walls; 'search Jerusalem with lamps' (Soph. i. 12), and strive to discover what is objectionable and what needs correction. That is the very least which you should do; for if you rightly understand your duty, you will not only take all necessary steps to avoid sin, but you will also see what more you can do to please God, and to advance your perfection.

Now let it be supposed that you have fallen into a careless way, and have committed, perhaps, many venial sins. In such a case, what is incumbent upon you? You should consider with all seriousness the evil of venial sin in itself, and in yourselves as religious; you should examine what you have to do in order to avoid those sins, taking care to note what are the causes of them; and you should, finally, make your good resolutions as to avoiding them and what gives rise to them.

First of all, then, let us examine what venial sin is in itself, and in a religious.

It may be asked: 'Is venial sin so very serious?'

We know that after mortal sin, which means spiritual death and everlasting ruin and punishment, venial sin, being an offence against God, but of lesser gravity, comes next in the order of evil; it wounds the soul and lessens its spiritual ardour and

energy; it merits severe chastisement; it delays our entry into heaven, and casts us into the flames of purgatory. These are some of the effects of venial sin; they should convince us of the evil which it is in itself. The souls in purgatory do not consider that venial sin is to be made light of.

But what is the guilt of it in a religious? You can never reach a sufficiently high standard of holiness; you should be ever pressing forward, and you will never regret any care, labour, and self-denial which your efforts in this direction may cost you. But what if you fall into venial sins as often and as easily as many secular persons do, perhaps even oftener than devout persons in the world do? How great the reproach which you would then deserve! 'If My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne with it; but thou . . . who didst take sweet meats together with me!' Try to bring yourselves to understand how serious an evil deliberate venial sin is, especially in one who bears the title of spouse of Christ. 'Man when he was in honour did not understand.' Does not the religious know how great the miseries are which are consequent upon the commission of deliberate venial sin? A religious thereby offends and dishonours her Spouse; she stains her soul; she renders herself less ready and active in corresponding with grace; she stays the flow of special graces; she encourages and strengthens her own evil proclivities; she opens the way to other failings; she lessens her piety and her effectiveness for good; she pleases the devil, and possibly she scandalizes her neighbour; she proves

herself ungrateful to God for all His benefits. How little we are able to do for God in return for all His goodness to us! The very least we should strive to do is to avoid every form of deliberate offence against Him. 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.'

Let us examine, secondly, what should be done to avoid venial sin.

One of the good results of your retreat should be that you will be resolved to try to avoid every deliberate venial sin. But it is most important to determine what steps you will take in order to keep this good resolution. I invite you to lay the axe to the root—that is, to remove the cause of these faults.

If you fall deliberately into venial sin, it arises from such causes as the following: dissipation of mind, omission of devout and earnest prayer and meditation, and of self-examination; it comes of not keeping yourselves under religious control, of breaking through the restraints wisely imposed upon you by your holy rules; it comes of associating too much with worldly persons; of speaking at random, without weighing the propriety of what you are about to say; it comes of your entertaining dislikes and animosities; it arises from your falling from fervour, and exposing yourselves recklessly to danger; it comes of your unwise curiosity or of your not watching over your senses; it arises from conceit or a vain self-confidence; and, lastly, it may sometimes result from a false conscience, foolishly leading you to think that what would be wrong in another will not, for one reason or another, be wrong

in you, or causing you to imagine that circumstances justify you in neglecting some duty, or in doing what under ordinary circumstances would be wrong. You must correct your conscience: the guide of your conduct must be an enlightened conscience. Conscience must not be made subservient to your wayward wills, but your wayward wills must be controlled and directed by an enlightened conscience. Put yourselves, then, upon your guard against these dangers.

In the third place, let me exhort you to conceive sincere sorrow for any deliberate venial sins into which you may have unhappily fallen, and to repent of them. If, by the aid of God's light and grace, you discover that you have laden your conscience with any such sins; if you become aware that you have not thought sufficiently of the evil of them, and that you have, perhaps, committed them with some frequency, try to be heartily sorry for this, and strive to detest and abhor all such deliberate sins. It is true that their gravity will not excite such contrition and abhorrence as mortal sins would; but, seeing that happily you do not fall into mortal sin, your lives may be passed without contrition, if you do not excite yourselves to sorrow for those sins which you do actually commit. Strive also to conceive this sorrow, because greater sanctity is demanded in you than in secular persons, and the commission of only venial sin by Christ's own spouses and special friends should be to them matter of sincere regret. 'If My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne it . . . but thou!'

God grant that you may understand ever more and more what holiness of life your beautiful vocation demands of you, and that you may earnestly strive to attain it! I pray that your hearts may be ever filled with sincere and lasting hatred of every form of evil, and with love and desire of all that is good, wise and profitable to you; that at all times you may please God, and spread around you the good odour of edification and piety. Holy David says: 'You that love the Lord hate evil' (Psa. xcvi. 10). Take this appeal as addressed to you, for you surely love God. Oh, you spouses of Christ, you devout servants of God, who love Him, hate evil; conceive a detestation of it and shun it. Every offence against God, though only venial sin, is an evil. Yes, you do and will hate every form of evil. Now is the time for generous resolutions. Too often have you offended, too long have you been remiss; but now you are banded together in religion as true and faithful servants of your Lord. You will grieve over your past infidelities and seek pardon for them; for now is the time of grace and mercy and of amendment.

And now, let me say in conclusion, if you have had the misfortune, through human frailty, to fall into deliberate sin, trust in the Divine mercy for forgiveness; cease not to lament your offence, and pray with David: 'Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.' Cast out the abomination of desolation from the holy place. Turn with confidence and renewed fidelity to the Sacred Heart of your Spouse, even as to the well of

infinite mercy and compassion, and as to the fountain of living water, to be pardoned, cleansed, and purified. Conceive also a great desire of amendment, and of living hereafter without offence. 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.' They see God in this world, and God communicates Himself to them in ways of which the wicked and indifferent have no experience. They enjoy the unction of joy and gladness of which David sang: 'Thou hast loved justice, and hatedst iniquity: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows' (Psa. xliv. 8). May this sweet and consoling unction, accorded to innocence of life, be merited by you and all spouses of Christ our Lord, and may it be to you a foretaste of the fuller, sweeter, and more lasting joys reserved for all the just in the kingdom of heaven!

SECOND DAY.

V.

MEDITATION.

'Make the way known to me wherein I should walk: for I have lifted up my soul to Thee.'—PSA. cxlii. 8.

YOU are required by your holy rules to devote a certain amount of time every day to meditation. What a privileged occupation this is, and how beneficial to your spiritual advancement! How enumerate the many benefits resulting from meditation? The clearer knowledge of God, of His perfections, of His dealings with you, of our Lord's work and designs in the Incarnation and Redemption, of the lessons of His sacred life and Passion, of His virtues and doctrine, of His generous provision in the Church for your sanctification and salvation; the clearer knowledge of your calling, of your duties, of the way of perfection, of the value of grace, of the beneficial use of the holy Sacraments, and of the many other helps and means to assist your souls on their journey to eternity. Then, besides the light of all such knowledge, what support, encourage-

ment, consolation, and devotedness, the various subjects of your meditations afford or inspire! In mental prayer you commune in a reverential but familiar manner with God; you lift up your soul to Him; you ask Him, as David did, to make known to you the way wherein you should walk; and you also supplicate Him to bestow upon you the graces needed to enable you to act up to the lessons which are suggested to you in your prayer. What more important subjects for consideration can be imagined than those which are the matter of your meditations? Do not, then, begrudge the time; do not, then, spend it listlessly. That time is not deemed misspent which the author, the artist, the mechanic, the scientist, the merchant, spend in cogitating over their undertakings, their speculations, their pursuits, and in devising the ways and means necessary for their accomplishment; will you, then, deem that time of no value in which you are invited to see how you may better serve God, advance in virtue, accomplish the ends of your holy vocation, advance your sanctification, and secure your everlasting salvation?

If the prophet Jeremias attributed the wickedness of the Jewish people to their neglect of serious thought—'With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart' (Jer. xii. 11)—it should not be held an exaggeration to refer to the neglect of meditation the falling away of a religious from the grace of her holy state. It is not the religious who makes her morning meditation seriously, piously, and assidu-

ously who falls from her fervour, who commits mortal sin, who scandalizes her sisters by remissness and unreligious conduct, who neglects the duties of her state; but the religious who acts in this unworthy manner will be found to be one who fails to make her morning meditation, or who makes it badly. Being called to a state in which you must ever tend to perfection, holding as you do special relations with our Lord, invited to attain a high degree of virtue, and ever engaged in pious works, you cannot sustain your spiritual life on only such ordinary and scanty food as might nourish a woman of the world following a secular vocation. No; your spiritual nourishment must be richer and more abundant, and it must be partaken of more frequently; otherwise you will become impoverished in religious thought and sentiment, and you will degenerate into mechanical and unprofitable servants of God, and but weak instruments of doing good—if, indeed, you do not gradually descend to a lower depth; if you do not end by giving disedification, or even by losing your vocation.

Do not, then, allow yourselves to take an erroneous view of the matter; a few vocal prayers, particularly if said in a routinal and perhaps hurried manner, are not sufficient to feed the lamp of that piety which belongs to your state of life—a lamp which should burn with such brilliancy before the face of your Divine Spouse; nor are they sufficient to irrigate the garden of the religious soul, which should blossom with the choicest flowers of Christian virtue; nor will they carry the rich sap of the vine

into branches which should yield the abundant and the delicious fruit expected by the Divine Master of the vineyard.

No; you must also meditate; and if you would meditate well and profitably, you must love and appreciate meditation. If King David, bearing all the cares and anxieties of a kingdom in troublous times, deemed it a duty to give himself to daily meditation, what a reproach his conduct should be to you if, away as you are from the wild turmoil of the world, and professing at the same time to pursue the way of perfection, you should yet seek to dispense yourselves from an exercise which cannot be omitted by a religious without detriment to her spiritual well-being! No; you will take for your model Mary, the blessed Mother of our Saviour, who pondered on the life and virtues and words of her Son, treasuring His sayings in her heart (St. Luke ii. 19 and 51); and like that other Mary, the sister of Martha, you will cast yourselves in spirit at the feet of your Divine Master to hear what He will say to you, and to learn the teachings of true wisdom (St. Luke x. 39).

I now invite you to examine what happy results may be expected from meditation, provided only that it be made assiduously and piously.

Let me repeat what I have already said in a somewhat summary way. Meditation will raise you to a higher and fuller knowledge of God, of Divine mysteries, of God's love, and of His dealings with you; also of the mission, example, and teaching of our Divine Lord. Meditation will assist you to act

with reflection ; it will give you an insight, not only into the inner life of our Lord, His holy Mother and the Saints, so as to impress its teaching upon you in a practical way, but it will also give you an insight into religious truths generally, and a comprehensive view of them, enabling you to realize what effects they should produce in your own life and conduct. Meditation will, further, give you a fuller knowledge of the blessedness of your holy calling, of the perfection demanded of you, of the duties of your state of life, and of the virtues which you are called upon to practise ; it will help you to a clearer knowledge of yourselves and of your faults ; finally, it will, as it were, impregnate you with religious thought.

How very desirable all this knowledge is ! St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xii. 1) : 'Now, concerning spiritual things, I would not have you ignorant.' Religious should not be uninstructed in spiritual things, therefore they should not neglect meditation.

Let me here call attention to the bearing of meditation upon the knowledge of spiritual things. It makes this knowledge thorough : for it brings the mind to focus itself upon various truths and lessons in succession ; it draws abundant matter out of the subjects upon which it concentrates itself, since it considers them leisurely and carefully from every point of view. A religious, therefore, who exercises herself piously and assiduously in daily meditation will not have only superficial knowledge in spiritual matters : she must necessarily acquire gradually very clear and copious information about them. Reflect,

too, that it is God Himself who teaches and enlightens you through meditation; for meditation is not simply a ruminating upon religious topics, it is a form of prayer in which petition or impetration—either by vocal extempore prayer or by the desires of your heart raised up to God—is a very important part. It is in the prayer of meditation that you approach to God to receive enlightenment, and you do not appeal to Him in vain. 'Come ye to Him,' sang holy David, 'and be enlightened' (Psa. xxxiii. 6). 'In Thy light we shall see light' (Psa. xxxv. 10). And our Lord promised, saying: 'Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth' (St. Matt. vii. 8).

Meditation is not, however, only an application of the mind. It is true that, in the body of the prayer, reflection and examination of the subject occupy the first place in point of order and time, for they are intended to let in the light of truth into the soul; but they are immediately followed by the eliciting of affections corresponding with the impressions which these truths have produced upon your minds. These affections are of the purest and most religious character, causing you to give God praise and becoming worship, by adoration, by admiration, by love, by thanksgiving, by joy, by respectful sympathy, by desire, by regret. These affections, excited by the subject under consideration, are of a more lively, impressive, and durable kind than those which are produced by external devout practices; and they are at the same time less emotional, for meditation will give greater solidity to your piety.

In the first part of your mental prayer it is God who speaks to you ; and in the second it is you who speak to God, as it were, in response, by the emotions and affections of your heart. It is then that you, in your turn, appreciate God's goodness and love ; and the wings of your desires bear you up to God, and in the direction of that perfection which He requires of you. Thus your meditation begins to become practical.

Having given vent to your affections, you proceed next, under the inspiration of the knowledge received and still fresh in your minds, and under the impulse of the affections and desires just elicited—you proceed next, I say, to turn your glance upon yourselves, with a view to apply the lessons learned, to examine your conduct, to regret and beg pardon for your shortcomings, and to make then your good resolutions for the future ; adding fervent prayer, to beseech God to give you the graces you need, and beseeching also the help of the intercession of our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph, and your holy Patrons in the same behalf.

Conceive, if you can, the wonderful benefit which daily meditation, properly made, must procure for your souls, and its holy influence upon your lives.

According to St. Augustine, prayer protects him who prays, it exasperates the enemy, it consoles the Angels, and it is a pleasing sacrifice to God. According to St. Jerome, he who neglects prayer enters into temptation.

We are told in the Acts of the Apostles what value the holy Apostles set upon prayer. Although,

as is piously believed, they were confirmed in grace, they would not trust themselves without prayer. When the number of the disciples increased, and the care of so many became an obstacle to their application to prayer, the Apostles ordained deacons who should see to the needs of the faithful, saying: 'But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word' (Acts vi. 4). You, then, with many important duties to fulfil, yet struggling with many weaknesses, liable to so many imperfections, and perhaps subject also to so many faults of character, cannot assuredly afford to dispense yourselves from this important exercise of the religious life. Our Lord says: 'Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth from the mouth of God.' It is in meditation that you masticate this desirable word, and pass it into your souls, so that it may prove to you the very food of knowledge and sustenance of virtue.

And now I invite you to picture to yourselves the life, or way of acting, of a religious who does not meditate.

It is quite possible that she may not wish her superior and her sisters to know that she does not make her morning meditation; and, to conceal the fact, she may have to adopt certain pretences or practise some deception; she will therefore descend to these unworthy measures. It is needless to say—and it is well that you should be persuaded of it—all pretences, deceptions, and make-beliefs, in this, as in other cases, do not, as a matter of fact, produce the effect desired; although your sisters, through

charity, may not upbraid you with your deception. But passing on from the possibility of the religious adopting such ruses to conceal her omission, consider the probable results of her neglect of meditation.

She will have a distracted or dissipated mind, and she is likely to perform her spiritual exercises, even the hearing of Mass, in a matter-of-fact way, with very little piety. Allowing, however, for the manifestation of some feeling produced by circumstances, or arising from her natural character, there will be a great deal of mechanical action in her works of charity and other duties of her holy calling. She will ordinarily be disposed to dissipation; and she may even come eventually to lose spirituality to such a degree as to deprive herself of much merit, and leave herself weak, and a prey to even serious failings in religious virtue. She will not possess her soul in patience, but will easily be affected by suffering, disappointment, opposition, anxiety, and by trying circumstances of every kind. She may be good-natured, and may on that account be esteemed, but she will not be spiritual; she will therefore be often unfaithful to grace, and she will experience but little devotion. She may, indeed, remain apparently always in the same groove—an unsatisfactory groove it is—but we are told that not to go forward is to be carried backward. She will easily tire of religious observance, and will fail to act, for the most part, from supernatural, and therefore meritorious motives. She will be fond of talking and gossiping, and be eager for news. There is yet

another possibility, akin to the one with which we began our surmises regarding this kind of religious. It is this: she will very probably keep up an appearance of religiousness; but with what object? To stand well with others, to gain favour with her superiors—possibly with the hope of being advanced to some desired position, or of retaining the one she may hold. Is not all this very lamentable in a religious? Ah, if fervent meditation, dutifully made, can change it, should such a religious delay to apply this desirable remedy?

Let us now pass from this distressing picture. If there should happen to be any such religious in this edifying community, God grant that she may come to see the evil of her neglect—a neglect which is bad enough in itself, but lamentably worse if a certain kind of hypocrisy be joined to it. Passing on, I say, let us see what the life of a religious who makes her meditation conscientiously is likely to be.

She will be devoutly prepared to assist with profit at the Holy Sacrifice, and to approach Holy Communion upon the appointed days. She will be pious and love prayer. Her religious conduct will be a source of edification to the members of her community, and to the seculars with whom she comes in contact. She will be appreciated by those for whose good she labours. She will be patient under trials, and will know how to turn to good account whatever may befall her; and she will be exact in fulfilling her duties. She will keep a good conscience, and will appreciate virtue in others.

Finally, she will be usually recollected, and will love the religious life and its practices. She will thus run in the holy path of God's commandments, conform herself to the Divine will, and come in this way to advance in grace and wisdom.

This is the wise and prudent virgin, waiting for her Lord; this is the good and faithful servant. She is going steadily forward towards the goal of her highest and holiest desires. The longer she perseveres in her dutifulness with regard to meditation, the more she will love it. She will not easily excuse herself from making her morning meditation.

Let me suppose that some religious neglect this important duty of the religious life. Under what plea are they guilty of such neglect? Are they doing something else more pleasing to God, and more profitable to their souls? The first religious of your holy Institute would not dream of omitting their meditation. Are not your superiors and so many exemplary sisters most faithful in this important observance? How is it, then, that you can afford to neglect it? When St. Teresa ceased to practise mental prayer, and used only vocal prayers, she was forced to admit the error of this infidelity. Her own words are these: 'This was the greatest and worst temptation that I ever had; for by this means I ran headlong to my own ruin.' She looked upon prayer as the gate through which God comes to us, and we pass to arrive at His love. 'I do not see,' she said, 'how God can come to us, or enrich us with His graces, if we shut the door against Him.'

You are now in retreat with the object of renew-

ing yourselves in the spirit of your mind, of taking up with fresh fervour every portion of your duties, and of correcting your short-comings. May God inspire you with a true love and appreciation of mental prayer, a practice without which there cannot be fervent religious life! Let your petition to Him be in the words of holy David: 'Make the way known to me wherein I should walk; for I have lifted up my soul to Thee.' God expects you to practise meditation; through it He enlightens and directs you, increases your virtue and grace, and fits you ever more and more for the duties which He has intrusted to you. Resolve, then, as you value your sanctification, to be ever faithful to it; it may not be omitted without spiritual detriment. Do not refuse to God this loving homage; do not rob your own souls of this desirable nourishment. You do not neglect to take food for your body, and you are careful to see that it is good and suitable; be then at least as careful about the food for your mind and soul. The soul of the religious who is faithful to meditation is not as the stunted shrub in the hard sterile ground, but it is as the 'tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in due season; and his leaf shall not fall off' (Psa. i. 3).

VI.

HOLY CHASTITY.

'O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory!'—
WISD. iv. 1.

THERE are whole treatises about the beautiful virtue of chastity. It would be well, in making your spiritual reading, to select sometimes, but not often, some author who treats of the vow of chastity. You would thus find all the instruction which is necessary upon it. Permit me in this retreat to make a few cursory remarks upon this subject of chastity, and upon what your exterior conduct should be.

In the case of everyone among you it is likely that you embraced the religious life with the special object of consecrating your virginity to God, and of protecting it under the sacred shelter of religion. 'Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people and thy father's house' (Psa. xliv. 11). Such was the secret whispering of grace to you; and under its guidance, and the sweet attraction of the holy virtue, you took the veil, the emblem of your withdrawal from the world and of your consecration to God. Was it perhaps devotion

to the ever-blessed Virgin Mother of our Lord which drew you? The psalmist says, 'After her shall virgins be brought to the king' (Psa. xliv. 15). Who shall say how many devout clients of Mary have received, through her intercession, the love of holy chastity, a sweet token of predestination? This vocation to embrace religion and live in chastity is termed the better part. 'Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her' (St. Luke x. 42). 'Everyone,' St. Paul tells us, 'hath his proper gift from God' (1 Cor. vii. 7). Your vocation, then, to embrace this holy state comes from God, who will also give you all the graces you need to persevere faithfully in it. 'As the Lord hath distributed to everyone, as God hath called everyone, so let him walk' (1 Cor. vii. 17). What part, then, is yours? St. Paul says: 'The virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit' (1 Cor. vii. 34).

A good religious wishes to preserve ever in brightness, purity, and freshness this most delicate virtue. There should be no unguardedness and no half-measures in doing this; for she has undertaken, by a deliberate and lasting vow made to God Himself, to observe chastity. This vow obliges her to purity of mind and heart, as well as to purity in her exterior conduct. The words of St. Paul, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Cor. iv. 7), may with truth be applied to the treasure of chastity. Consecrated as you now are by vow to God, you have renounced and closed your mind against every voluntary unchaste thought; you have sealed your

heart against every carnal affection; you have put a guard over your senses, forbidding any approach dangerous to the holy virtue through these avenues of the soul; and you have taken Christ Himself, the Beloved of all beloved, to be your Spouse. This is truly a Divine alliance. Your chastity is immolated upon the highest and most sacred altar, and your sacrifice has been accepted by the Most High in the odour of sweetness.

You are determined to observe your vow with the most exact fidelity. You will keep yourselves from every compromise and every shadow of voluntary fault against it; you will avoid every danger which any circumstance, place, or person might create in regard of it; and although temptation of one kind or another may arise from time to time—if not frequently, as happened with some of the Saints—you will offer a firm and continual resistance. This will not be all; for you will, moreover, employ every means, especially devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament and Holy Communion, and tender piety towards our Blessed and Immaculate Mother, to foster this transcendent virtue of holy chastity.

These are certainly grand resolutions to take; it it is to be hoped that you will not fall short in fulfilling them. You may ask if you really must do all these things in order to observe your vow. Yes; you may not strike off any of these good resolutions as unnecessary if you are determined to preserve your chastity unsullied by any deliberate fault. Those who have had the misfortune to fail in regard to their vow owe their misfortune to their having

failed to do some of the things included in these resolutions.

I invite you now to consider what these resolutions require you to do.

First of all, there must be a guard placed to keep danger from you. The citadel must be protected by ramparts ; the guard must be ever on the watch; the soldiers must wear their armour and keep their weapons in their hands : then there will be a sense of security. In regard of the holy virtue, those who are firm in their piety, and assiduous in fulfilling their duties, will be well fortified against the enemy. Over the mind you must place a spirit of recollection, a wariness against the approach of evil, and a constant union with God ; over the heart you must place the seal of piety and love of duty ; over your senses, especially over the eyes, a watch of guardedness; and over your whole demeanour a general garb of modesty and reserve. This will be as your shield.

It is not enough to hold yourself in readiness to resist your foe and to be fortified against danger. In the second place, you must carefully avoid going voluntarily into danger. Such is human frailty in this matter, that it is better to appear cowardly than bold, wiser to avoid the enemy than to engage him. What the holy writer says may easily come to pass : 'He that loveth danger shall perish in it' (Ecclus. iii. 27). The ways of danger are often covered like a snare ; a profitless curiosity often leads the unwary from the safe way. By how little some get entangled, but how great finally is their fall!—'as

if,' says Solomon, 'a bird should make haste to the snare, and knoweth not that his life is in danger' (Prov. vii. 23). I will not attempt to particularize the dangers which you should avoid, beyond saying: Be careful as to what you read, as to what you want to know, as to circumstances or places where you might meet with temptation, and, finally, as to friendships which are termed particular, and those which arise from admiration. Impress upon your minds the fact that if you court danger you court defeat.

And now, in the third place, you have to consider what your conduct should be when your enemy actually assails you. You would wish to be spared this kind of trial; it is a very keen and sore and humiliating one. You must combat valiantly in defence and protection of so precious a treasure; you may be robbed of it even by interior consent of the mind to an evil suggestion. What, then, must you do? You must deal promptly and resolutely with every evil thought and imagination, and you must guard yourselves against tender, and therefore dangerous, affections. Happily, you are spared many dangers which society presents to the unwary; you are respected even by the enemies of religion, and much more so by Catholics. But if, notwithstanding all this, some unexpected circumstance of danger should arise, fly from it promptly, guard your eyes from unwariness, and use the shield and the weapon of prayer. The lives of some of the holy virgins placed in the calendar of the Saints afford striking examples of their triumph over danger, and of their

perseverance in dealing with offensive thoughts, imaginations, and suggestions, when our Lord has permitted them to be afflicted by this kind of trial. Let me mention one instance, that you may take courage by recognising that the arising of evil imaginations is not a sign of depravity, but that it is one of the forms of trial from which the greatest Saints have not escaped. We read in the Life of St. Catharine of Siena that her imagination was often filled with offensive representations, and that she even seemed sometimes on the very point of taking pleasure in them; but by the help of fervent prayer, humility, resignation, and confidence in God, she always gained the victory over them. On one occasion, after a long and violent conflict, our Lord deigned to visit her, and she said to Him, 'Where wast Thou, my Divine Spouse, whilst I lay in such an abandoned, frightful condition?' 'I was with thee,' He seemed to reply. 'What!' she exclaimed, 'amidst the abominations with which my soul was infested?' Then He answered: 'They were displeasing and most painful to thee; the conflict, therefore, was thy merit, and the victory over them was owing to My presence.'

The resolutions which I have declared it necessary to take require you, lastly, to cultivate and foster the holy virtue. But how is this to be done? You will do it by fervent prayer and by zeal for spiritual advancement; for the more spiritual you become, the more lustrous and beautiful will your chastity be. It flourishes in the garden of piety, but languishes, and even perishes, outside of it. I need not appeal

to you to love it; if you love it, you will cherish it. But poor human nature is weak and prone to evil; receive, then, the bread of the strong. You foster the holy virtue especially by receiving Holy Communion with great interior devotion. The Blessed Eucharist is 'the corn of the elect, and wine springing forth virgins' (*Zach.* ix. 17). You foster it also by devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and by constant recourse to her powerful intercession. You foster it, finally, by the mortification of your senses and of your appetite.

'How beautiful is the chaste generation with glory!' How dear to our Lord was the spotless purity of Mary! 'Thou art all fair.' How pleasing to Him was also the chastity of St. Joseph and of St. John, of St. Martha, and of so many other Saints! How agreeable to Him you too will be, if you observe sacredly your holy vow of chastity!

In what holy society and association it places you! You are associated by it with saintly pontiffs and holy priests and religious, and with devout nuns of countless orders and institutes, who have all consecrated their virginity to God. What nobility there is in chastity! How pure the flame which should ever burn in your hearts! How it disposes you for choice graces, and gives you an attraction towards all that is good and holy! It detaches your affection from what is worldly and unworthy. What a help it is, therefore, to you to practise the other virtues, and to maintain innocence of life. But how richly and how specially it will be rewarded! What a happy privilege yours will be in the realms of

heavenly glory to 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth' (Apoc. xiv. 4), all radiant with a distinguishing aureole of brightness!

But let me say, unless you prize and love holy chastity, you will experience difficulty in keeping your vow inviolate. You have seen how guarded you must be, what precautions you must take, how strenuously you must protect the great treasure, and with what piety you must foster it. These things will not be done assiduously and constantly if you do not love and prize the holy virtue. The careless and unwary and imprudent will surely fall more or less seriously.

Someone has said that 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread.' This saying has its application in the case of religious who, by association or correspondence, or in other ways, run any hazard prejudicial to their vow. We have read in spiritual books whole chapters about religious being too fond of visits, about the danger of remaining too long in the parlour. There may have been some abuses in certain convents; affections may have been encouraged which appeared innocent enough, but which were unseemly in a religious; admiration and appreciation of virtue and of good works may have developed into admiration which was too personal; little presents may have been given and received; perhaps photographs were exchanged; the visits may have been wished for and looked forward to. Are we to suppose that all this was laudable, that it was for the glory of God? Were the religious—in some way not conceived by ordinary mortals—

prosecuting their vocation by taking part in such conduct? Was their action meritorious in the sight of God, edifying to their neighbour and beneficial to their own souls? Apart from a lamentable waste of time, and a possible neglect of duty, and a most probable breach of rule in various ways, might there not have been in such conduct an exposure to danger with regard to the holy virtue? This sublime virtue of chastity is of so delicate and pure a nature that more than ordinary precautions are needed to preserve it from being sullied. Indeed, the only safe rule which can be laid down for you, in order to maintain its purity and freshness, is to require you to be most circumspect, wary, prudent and strict in all your conduct. Your love of this virtue, and your care in preserving it, must leave nothing to be desired.

I am not venturing to call in question your great love of it and your desire to be faithful in preserving it all-unsullied; but you will understand, from what we have seen, that even the most holy and those most advanced in religious virtue may not neglect any precautions necessary for safeguarding it, or expose themselves voluntarily or unnecessarily to any danger.

Do you not know how insidiously temptation may present itself? how a thought, from which all evil is absent, may suddenly develop into a bad thought, one to be rejected on the instant? and also how an affection, at first quite innocent, may become too natural, and then actually dangerous? You know that you would do wrong to find place in your

religious and chaste minds and hearts for any dangerous thought or affection. Have you not, by your vow and profession, drawn a certain line for yourselves, withdrawing yourselves from the world, and consecrating yourselves to God? And are you not bound, therefore, to watch carefully over yourselves, lest you should fail in any way, or give to your heavenly Spouse a divided affection?

Yet, withal that your consecration is so sacred, you are not altogether free from temptation. Do you not know that the enemy will make his onslaught and use his wiles? He will strive to introduce the poison into your heart and to conceal its virulence. He would like to cause you to entertain the evil thought, or say the ill-judged word, or take the dangerous step; but there will be some delusion to ensnare you into doing it. He will endeavour to make you fall first, and will then leave you to discover afterwards your mistake and your misfortune. Better far the bold assault, the horrid open temptation, than the covered pitfall, the charming delusion. May God help you, I say; may He always enable you to discern the danger in time, and may He preserve you from the smallest voluntary fault!

Happily, in your exterior conduct, while not discarding the gentleness of manner and kindliness of expression which become religious and win for you respect and esteem, you are taught to act with that reserve and decorum which gives a pure tone to your own minds, and inspires others with the sacredness of your calling. If you were to dispense with this prudent reserve, you would thereby remove

some of the outer bulwarks, and render the citadel less secure. Remember, too, that when the temptation does arise—while the assault of Satan comes, as it were, from without—so weak and vitiated is poor fallen human nature, that you may say you have a traitor within. So you may consider as addressed to yourselves that warning of the Holy Scriptures: 'He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed, lest he fall.' Therefore mistrust yourselves, and be in every way particular and cautious. If you avoid all unnecessary danger, you have One whom you may trust. You may feel confident that our Lord, the Divine Spouse of your souls, will shield you with special graces, and lead you safe along the beautiful way which He calls you to go, and which you have chosen under His vocation, and for love of Him. But be strict, be watchful; for chastity is as a most delicate flower; its whiteness and purity are easily sullied, and its delicate fibres are easily injured; and the rude impressions it may suffer are with difficulty, if ever, entirely removed. They may manifest themselves from time to time until the end of your lives.

Need I ask you to remember that God is a jealous God (Exod. xx. 5): He prizes the consecration which you have made of yourselves to Him; any breach of the vow is more than an ordinary sin—it bears the character of a sacrilege. Jesus Christ Himself is now the Divine Spouse of your souls; He has, as it were, said to you: 'I will espouse thee to Me for ever' (Osee ii. 19). What a privilege, what a happiness, this is for you! Ah, you will not

push Him aside; you will not rather take pleasure in the society or affection of an unworthy creature. Nothing shall induce you to forego your happy and honourable privilege. Let every thought and suggestion be instantly dismissed, which would deprive you of your place in the Sacred Heart of your Lord.

But why do I pursue this topic, why dwell upon it? Only to impress you more and more with an earnest and loving appreciation of the vow which you have taken, and of your happiness in having consecrated your virginity to God; also to strengthen your dutiful affection for the holy virtue, that when any rude trial arises, you may be filled with the holy sentiments of the St. Catharines, of St. Teresa, St. Rose, St. Brigid, St. Clare, and countless other holy virgins, in whose footsteps it is your privilege to follow. 'O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory!' It is with such that our Lord holds sweet commune; it is upon such that He bestows many choice graces. The more perfect your holy chastity, the easier it will be to walk in the way of fervour and piety, and the greater will be the fruit which you will derive from Holy Communion and devout prayer.

In a few days you will renew your vow of chastity. Oh, do it with great fervour and affection! In the meantime, see if you need in any way to further wall in, or more securely safeguard, this delicate lily of the religious garden; consecrate your chastity with renewed fidelity to the sacred and most pure Heart of our Lord, and place it anew under the safe

guardianship of His Immaculate Mother. Pray, finally, for even a greater esteem of this precious virtue, and for the grace to preserve it ever bright and intact; that, in the kingdom of your heavenly Spouse, you may be privileged to be associated with those virgins who sing the new canticle before the throne, and follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

VII.

NEGLECT.

'My vineyard I have not kept.'—CANT. i. 5.

WE cannot but acknowledge that among the causes of evil and the beginnings of sad fallings-away neglect holds a prominent place. Take away neglect of grace, neglect of duty, neglect of means, neglect of precautions, and neglect of opportunities, and you remove the sad cause of much moral deterioration, evil courses, and spiritual ruin. We are told in the Gospel narrative that before those men who were invited to the marriage-feast of the king's son were passed by, under the anger of the king, 'they neglected' (St. Matt. xxii. 5) to respond to the gracious invitation. So when seculars begin to neglect the pious practices of their youth—to omit their usual prayers, to discontinue the frequentation of the holy Sacraments, to keep away from sermons, and in other ways to neglect the means of their sanctification, and to remove the safeguards of their virtue—there is ample reason for apprehension. For neglect of this kind, which is really very serious, is followed by neglect of graver obligations, and that is then realized which is said in Ecclesiasticus:

'He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little' (xix. 1).

You may have heard of cases in which neglect such as I have portrayed has occurred, and has led to some sad falling-away. Would it not be well, in this retreat, to examine if neglect may have crept, in some degree or other, into your own manner of life? Do not, however, begin the examination with a conviction that there is little or no occasion for it, but rather with an apprehension that, very possibly, you have been guilty of neglect in various ways, without having, perhaps, dwelt seriously upon the consequences. Why, Saints have written to Saints to warn them against neglect. Thus, we find St. Paul writing to St. Timothy in these words: 'Neglect not the grace that is in thee. . . . Meditate upon these things. . . . Take heed to thyself' (1 Tim. iv. 14-16). St. Bernard writes to Pope Eugenius: 'In vain do you exert yourself about other matters, if you neglect yourself. Of what avail will it be to save the whole world, if, all the rest being gained, you lose yourself?' St. Bernard counsels him therefore to begin by considering himself and his own needs.

Let me invite you to impress upon yourselves the evil of neglect, by the thought that one of the wiles of your satanical foe is to induce you to neglect your grace or your duty. Our Lord teaches this in the parable in which He says that, good seed having been sown in a certain field, an enemy came and oversowed cockle: this was while men slept (St. Matt. xiii. 25). Let me adduce for your imitation

the example of Nehemias, who was too wary to be led to neglect the great work in which he was employed. We are told that the enemies of the Jews, seeing Nehemias rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, sought to decoy him from his work; they therefore invited him to the villages at a distance to make a league with them. But Nehemias detected their stratagem, and sent answer: 'I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down, lest it be neglected whilst I come, and go down to you' (2 Esd. vi. 3). Four times they sent the same invitation, and four times did Nehemias return the same answer.

Have not you also a great work to do? You must not neglect it. You have a vineyard to keep; you must not have to say, 'My vineyard I have not kept.' Your great work is, as you know, to attend to your own sanctification.

God has lavished upon you countless graces from the time of your baptism until the present hour. Do you keep this unspeakable goodness of God well to the front in your memory? Do you ask yourselves, Why all this goodness? Do you recognise that it is with design that God has done this? Do you fear lest, perhaps, you may frustrate God's designs in your regard? There are, no doubt, particular designs in His dealings with each one of you; but there is unmistakably one design common in the case of every one of you, and this general design is your sanctification, with a view to your salvation. 'Now,' says St. Paul, 'being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have

your fruit unto sanctification, and the end life everlasting' (Rom. vi. 22). Again, he says: 'This is the will of God, your sanctification' (1 Thess. iv. 3).

If these texts are addressed to all Christians, they have their full force and meaning when applied to religious. It is incumbent on you to co-operate with God's designs in the work of your sanctification, but do you? Is there any neglect on your part? Are you afraid to put to yourselves this question: 'Am I doing my utmost to avail myself of the graces and opportunities which are afforded me by God's goodness for my sanctification? Or am I neglecting my sanctification?' You may be able even now to give some answer to this question in its general bearing upon your manner of life; but as fresh and particular matter will come under your examination during the course of the retreat, you may during it discover where your particular neglect is.

Opposed to neglect is assiduity. The one is detrimental, the other is beneficial; the one is unworthy in a religious, the other is commendable, and is also expected in her. The graces found in religion are richer and more abundant, ordinarily speaking, than those which are within the reach of seculars; the graces of the religious state are of a special order, and they should therefore, if used with assiduity, produce special fruits of sanctification. Witness, the Holy Mass heard every day, the Holy Communion received several times a week, the meditations and prayers, the spiritual reading and other observances, the silence and recollection, and

the works to which your holy institute is devoted. Who shall reckon the marvellous results in your sanctification of all these grace-yielding acts, observances and works? You may not feel conscious of their beneficial operation, but take care not to impede it. If you are not conscious of any wilful neglect, you should not be disheartened or discouraged, but yet apply to yourselves the grave exhortation of the Apostle: 'With fear and trembling work out your salvation' (Phil. ii. 12). It is addressed to all. In order to incite yourselves to more earnest and sustained effort, ask yourselves what and where are the fruits of sanctification which you should have gathered.

You are aware, too, that there is a responsibility weighing upon you of yielding fruit according to the grace received; for our Lord says: 'Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required' (St. Luke xii. 48). Where, then, you may ask yourselves, are the abundant fruits corresponding with the many and great graces bestowed upon you?

I put these serious considerations before you, not to overwhelm you with anxiety and apprehension—for, thank God, there is no cause for it—but to make you alive to your responsibility, and to stir you to greater assiduity. You have to cultivate your vineyard; you have to dress, and even prune, the vines; you have to destroy noxious insects, and keep out the beasts that would lay waste the vineyard. That is, you must be careful to do all that is required of you as religious; you have to attend to

your own spiritual needs, and to edify and do good to others. Your book of rules, drawn up with such care and such wisdom, and confirmed by ecclesiastical authority, delineates the mode of life which the members of your institute should adopt and be faithful in following. Love it and respect it.

You have religious exercises to perform: perform them, not remissly and with tepidity, but devoutly and profitably. Just as you may take your bodily nourishment without its doing you much good, so may you perform these exercises without deriving much profit from them. You should take your food with appetite, and masticate and digest it well, then it will nourish you. You should perform your religious exercises willingly, fully, and with religious piety, then will they specially benefit you.

You have, moreover, to protect your vineyard and preserve the vines; that is, you have to guard yourselves against vainglory, conceit, dissipation, sloth, sensuality, worldliness, misunderstandings, uncharitableness, jealousy, envy, and everything which is detrimental to religious virtue. You must look upon these faults and imperfections as insects which will destroy the vines; you know what evil and what injury will follow if they are left unchecked and unguarded against.

You have also to keep a watch over your senses, lest they become a stumbling-block to you; lest they admit evil impressions, drawing your soul towards the commission of sin in thought, desire or act—thus, as it were, letting in the wild beasts to ravage or lay waste the vineyard.

What a lesson you may learn from the assiduous care which some religious bestow upon their bodies! One would almost think that they prized them more than their souls. What attention, sometimes excessive and unseemly, they give to their dress and appearance, to their ease and comfort, to their food and rest. But if the body is sick, how this attention is increased! Sometimes, it would almost seem, to the exclusion of all spirituality, and even of womanly fortitude. Oh, if all this assiduity could be brought into play in the interests of your souls and of your sanctification!

With other religious, however, the assiduity lies in another direction. They are not open to reproach on the score of excessive attention to their bodily care; their assiduity wears the appearance of zeal; it lies in the direction of labour for others, and of exterior works. Their zeal stops at nothing—that is the fault of it, for zeal must be regulated by the cardinal virtues. The fault is that, while spending themselves for others, or expending all their energy upon exterior works, they neglect themselves. The admonition which St. Gregory addresses to a priest may also be suitably given to a religious of the class of those whose conduct I am now portraying. St. Gregory warns the priest to be careful, while succouring others, not to abandon himself, and while raising others, not to fall himself.* Solomon says: 'He that neglecteth his own way shall die' (Prov. xix. 16). Let me say, then, that these religious who are

* 'Ne proximos juvando se deserat, ne alios erigens cadat.' —'De Cura Pastorali.'

altogether devoted to exterior works have need to take care lest they weaken and impoverish their souls, through the neglect of those means which furnish them with that piety, fortitude and patience which are so necessary to them.

How sad are the consequences when religious neglect their sanctification, no matter from what cause it may arise. The prophet Jeremias says in his Lamentations (iv. 1) : ' How is the gold become dim, the finest colour is changed.' When piety is discarded, when prayer is neglected, when holy Mass is heard only through routine, when Holy Communion is received with little or no devotion, when religious observance is not valued, and when the rule is not heeded ; ah, may we not fear that the religious, as such, will fall away to a shadow from want of spiritual nourishment ; that her light will become dim, that her arm will become weak, and that her step will become feeble ? She will not be her former self ; she will be, as it were, in decline. She will lose merit for herself, and her capability of doing good to others will be lessened. It will be well if the religious character in her does not finally become extinct. Those who knew her in her fervour will meet her now, and be struck by the change. Formerly they derived edification from her piety and religiousness ; now it will be otherwise. What David said in his affliction may be said by this neglectful religious : ' My heart is withered, because I forgot to eat my bread ' (Psa. ci. 5).

It may be thought that perhaps the kind of life led by such a religious affords her some satisfaction.

It is difficult to conceive how this can be: for wherever there is neglect, there is a want of security; there must necessarily be something wanting, and a general unsatisfactoriness. It may be asked, Is anything done really well by the negligent religious? She will not be attached to the religious life as such; sometimes her heart will not be in her work; sometimes she will be brought to her most important duties only by constraint; perhaps she will even shirk some, while she will perform others unwillingly. She will not be so devoid of judgment as not to perceive the incongruity of this manner of acting, nor so dull of conscience as not to be sensible of its unworthiness. Yet we see her pursuing the path of neglect of her sanctification with such persistency that nothing is done perfectly; and it is to be feared that imperfection creeps into her whole conduct, even into the holiest actions. Such a religious cannot feel really satisfied with herself; she cannot experience true peace of heart.

Let us ask ourselves, lastly, how she stands with Almighty God. We have much to learn from the messages sent by our Lord to the Bishops of the seven Churches, and in them there are possibly some passages which would apply to the case of a negligent religious. Let me quote a few passages: 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first charity. Be mindful, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and do penance, and do the first works.' Again: 'Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die. For I find not thy works full before My God. Observe

and do penance.' And again: 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth. Be zealous, therefore, and do penance.'

The negligent religious has fallen from her first fervour; her works are languishing, and are performed imperfectly; she is lukewarm; to her, therefore, even as in our Lord's name, the message comes: 'Do penance.' Let her arouse herself to a consciousness of her state, and of its evil consequences; let her respond to the invitation and heed the admonition; let her do penance; and for the love of her Divine Spouse, let her change her way of life, so as to make it more pleasing to Him and more meritorious for herself. Let her also unite the motive of holy fear to that of love, and let her fear God, who calls her to have a zeal for her sanctification, and who lavishes such rich and abundant graces upon her. 'How shall we escape,' asks St. Paul, 'if we neglect so great salvation?' (Heb. ii. 3). 'He that feareth God,' says Solomon, 'neglecteth nothing' (Eccles. vii. 19). Those who neglect grace have reason to fear that God may withdraw His graces from them. The punishment of the negligent servant spoken of by our Lord was that he should lose all. 'Take ye away, therefore, the talent from him, and give it him that hath ten talents. For to everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away' (St. Matt. xxv. 28, 29).

Such are the considerations upon the subject of the neglect of the means of your sanctification to which I invite your study and examination. So weak and inconstant is fallen nature, that I may venture to say that all of you have need to be upon your guard against falling away from fervour. Who amongst you is not conscious that she is possibly guilty of some kind of neglect in the important work of her sanctification? You may, then, ask yourselves of what kind your neglect is, and what is its extent. It may be neglect of grace, neglect of duty, neglect of the means of sanctification, neglect of necessary precautions, or neglect of many opportunities. If it were not for neglect of one kind or another, what progress you would make, what edification you would give, what good you would accomplish, and what merit you would acquire!

Alas if, when the time of the harvest arrives, you discover only then that the wheat has been oversown by cockle, and stifled by it! Alas if, when the Lord of the vineyard comes, He shall find it neglected and laid waste! Alas if, when the cry is heard, 'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet Him,' you are amongst the foolish virgins whose lamps have gone out! Alas if, when the eye is becoming dim, and the death-sweat moistens your brow, the memory of your past lives —instead of consoling you with a picture of assiduity in the service of God, and in the work of your sanctification—shall bring you only misgiving and alarm, because of your neglect of piety and religious observance, and because of the disedification to

others which has resulted from it! Alas if then you have to make the avowal, 'My vineyard I have not kept!' Labour now while there is yet time to save yourselves from such a reproach, and from such an undesirable experience. I beg of you not to underrate the evil and sad consequences of persistent neglect.

The object of your monthly and annual retreats is a renewal of yourselves in the spirit and practices of your holy vocation, and in zeal for your sanctification. It is very important, with a view to this spiritual renewal, that you should endeavour to correct any wilful and persistent neglect which may have crept into your conduct. Conceive, therefore, a sincere desire of amendment, and let it be your endeavour to replace neglect by assiduity; strive to turn to better account your opportunities of reaping benefit for your own souls, and of doing good to others from the pure motive of God's love. Let it be your desire to yield a more adequate return, than in the past, for the graces which God has bestowed upon you so bountifully, so mercifully, and so lovingly, with a view to your sanctification and the accomplishment of your vocation. May God, then, grant you the grace of true conversion from all sin and negligence, so that you may be able to say with holy David: 'Prove me, O God, and know my heart; examine me, and know my paths. And see if there be in me the way of iniquity, and lead me in the eternal way' (Psa. cxxxviii. 23, 24).

THIRD DAY.

VIII.

PURITY OF INTENTION.

'Whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's.'—ROM. xiv. 8.

As religious consecrated to God, you are not labouring for any passing reward. You are, in a sense, labouring in the vineyard, associated with those who, in one sphere of good work or in another, are ministering to the mission of the Church in the world; and you look forward to the evening-time, when the Lord of the vineyard shall say to His Angels, 'Call now the labourers, and pay them their hire.' You are also associated with the religious of every age of the Church, who, under a special call from God, have left all things to devote themselves assiduously to their perfection. Theoretically, all this is so; but that it may be so practically, it behoves each one of you to enter into the spirit of her vocation, to purify her intentions, and to direct her life and actions to the glory of God, and to those supernatural ends for which she should labour. So I invite

you in this retreat to make the inquiry and examination, to see if your lives and actions are thus directed and thus rendered meritorious; or if, perhaps, you are somewhat wanting in sincerity and in purity of intention; if, perchance, you are at times actuated by selfish or worldly or other unworthy motives, while, to all appearances, you are the servants of God.

You know that you all set some end before you in everything you do, and that this end gives the character, in God's sight, to what you do. If the end proposed by you in any action be worthy and meritorious, then the action, if not wrong in itself, will become a worthy and meritorious action. Yet an action, meritorious in itself, may be vitiated by being performed from some unworthy motive. We should, for instance, offer an insult to the Divine Majesty if we were to believe that any policy or undertaking, though good in itself, if instigated by dishonesty of purpose—particularly if, as might be the case, furthered by any unworthy procedure, or by untruthfulness—would find favour with the God of all truth and of all holiness. See, then, the importance of being actuated by good motives, and remember, as to this, that it rests with you, grace helping you, to give the good and meritorious motive to your action. God may give the necessary inspiration and assistance, but the co-operation, the decision, and correspondence or compliance, will be yours. You have, in this sense, complete free-will in directing your intention; you have therefore, under these conditions, the key of the situation ever in your own hands.

God helping you, you can direct every action and the whole course of your religious life to God, and thus your days will be full of merit. I beg and exhort you to impress this truth of practical religion thoroughly upon your minds. If, happily, you do dedicate your works to God, then are you undeniably His true servants, and you may say with St. Paul, 'Whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's.' Do you desire any greater consolation than this? Do you expect to reap any more desirable gain or satisfaction than this affords, when, unhappily, you place before yourselves any other aim? How well it would be if you could so far purify your intentions and direct your actions as to be able to say with St. Paul, 'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Phil. i. 21). By these words he gives expression to the intensity of his zeal for God, and his devotedness to his work for our Lord.

When you were novices, you studied those aims which, as members of your holy Institute, you were expected to put before you in your future life in the religious state. You saw how you would be required to practise the virtues of the religious life, to abstain from unnecessary contact with the world and its vanities, and to devote yourselves under obedience to such good works as are undertaken by your institute.

These were indeed holy and worthy ends to place before you in your lives; these ends give the stamp of holiness to your calling. The more you then studied them when you were in your fervour, the grander did your calling appear to you. You

saw that it was no ordinary secular vocation, but one intended for persons who should renounce the world and their own wills, who should be earnest in piety and zealous only for good. The noble and holy ends proposed to you by the rules and constitutions of your institute attracted you and attached you to your vocation, and made you desirous of labouring in such a cause.

Are you still fired with zeal to prosecute these holy aims of your Institute? No other ends can appeal so forcibly to your pious devotedness; no other less holy ends could claim the self-sacrificing efforts, the earnestness of soul, the heroism of action and suffering, with which the true and great servants of God have prosecuted these same aims in every age of the Church. Labouring for these holy ends will sanctify your lives, and win for you great merit.

But will you, now that you have been a few years in religion, degenerate? Will you now, owing to indifference, sloth, self-love, or tepidity, allow your ardour to die out? Will you forget the ends you once put before yourselves with so much ardour? Shall your holy Institute, still young in Church, begin to fall away from its pristine zeal for the glory of God, and for religious virtue and observance? God has blessed its work so far. Its first members have left you their footprints of piety, virtue, and edification, and you rightly hold their names in veneration. Does their example cease now to animate you? Is it not incumbent upon you to strive to leave for those religious who shall come after you a similar example of virtue and devotedness? You

surely do not deem these days of religious indifference the time to fall away from the fervour of your holy vocation? These are, indeed, the very days in which there is all the greater need to foster religious instincts, and maintain religious observance in its full vigour. If laxity and indifference have caused a deterioration of piety among the ordinary faithful, holy Church should be able, at any rate, to point to her religious institutes as evidences that she is still distinguished by the ineffaceable mark of holiness, by which she shall ever be known to be the Spouse of the Lamb. In your institute, thank God, there is no serious reason for speculating upon any falling away; but you would do well, all the same, to animate yourselves to renewed fervour by calling to mind what the aims and requirements of your institute are, and by recognising your obligation, each one in her own sphere, to labour to fulfil them. All other aims are outside the scope of your vocation. It is therefore important that you should examine what ends you really have in view, and what the spirit of your service actually is. See if you are servants of God in name only, or in reality, and renew yourselves in the spirit of your minds, that you may not lose any of the precious merits which are to be gained by doing all for God, and in a manner to please Him.

A spirit of faith should pervade your whole conduct. It will remind you of God ever present, and of the fervour and exactitude which you should bring to your service of Him. This spirit of faith will be a safeguard against hypocrisy—a baneful

disease which finds its way, in some form or other, and in some degree or other, even into the conduct of many religious, and vitiates to some extent much which they do. This spirit of faith will teach you to purify your intentions, to perform your actions well, to pray with recollectedness, to spend your time profitably, and to recreate yourselves with moderation. It will save you from many faults arising from dissipation of mind and thoughtlessness of conduct. It will remind you of your responsibility to God for all you do. Responsibility, you may ask? Yes. For all you do? Yes; you are never free from it. But does this responsibility really weigh with you? And does it beget in you a sense of duty and carefulness of conduct? Are you always, in a spirit of faith, reckoning with Almighty God? Do you, as indeed you ought, look upon your daily examinations of conscience as times at which to sum up your reckoning? Is it possible that, leaving God out of your thoughts and reckoning, you admit into your manner of life or actions some insincerity, some crookedness, or something that is not straightforward? Can you say that you really act with purity of intention? While making a certain show of religiousness in your conduct, are you perhaps actuated by motives and principles which are not religious? Have you really in view something very different from what appears on the surface? Is there ever in you an intention to mislead your superiors or your sisters in religion? And do you consider such diplomacy honourable in the holy state of life which you have embraced? Would

not all good Christians reprobate such unworthy conduct? A religious certainly cannot deceive herself into the belief that it can be pleasing to God. It is possible that she may succeed in gaining her unworthy end whatever it may be; but will she really be the gainer if she has not sought thereby the glory of God? 'Whatever you do,' said St. Paul, 'do all for the glory of God.' But if she had not this in view! 'Do I seek to please men?' asked St. Paul; 'if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ' (Gal. i. 10). The same should also be said if a religious strove to please only herself or the world, or if she worked with other unworthy ends in view.

It is no matter for wonder, if a religious is reckoning with man, and not with God, that so many imperfections are noticeable in her conduct—no matter for wonder that she works in a half-hearted way. What fruit can she expect from her religious observance, and from her fulfilment of the duty assigned to her, if supernatural motives are not present to instigate her and sustain her?

You must be guided by some motive and end worthy of your efforts, or your energy will flag, and your effort will not be sustained. You do not wish to be like those whom St. Paul describes as beating the air and running at an uncertainty; you do not wish to find that you have laboured in vain; you certainly labour in vain if you do not work to please God. St. Paul says: 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for what things a man shall sow, those also he shall reap' (Gal. vi. 7, 8).

It may be said that there are primary and secondary ends. Undoubtedly this legitimate and necessary distinction must be allowed ; but let the right order and place be given to everything. What a waste of time and energy it would be if, relegating duty to a secondary and subservient place, you were to give your chief thought to your own ease and comfort, to vanity and vainglory, to worldly attachments or self-love, to love of esteem and honour, or to unworthy ambition! These are some of the causes which may, entirely or in part, rob your actions of their merit in the sight of God. To place such ends before you is to introduce a blight which will, as far as your own merit is concerned, lessen or destroy the fruit of your works. I am sure you cannot fail to see that to allow such considerations to detract from the intrinsic value and supernatural merit of your actions is to act against your own highest interests, and to depart, by so much and so far, from those holy ends which your institute proposes to you.

It is not too much to expect, then, that during this retreat you should endeavour to purge out of your conduct all unworthy motives and aims. God, who is the Searcher of reins and hearts, deigns to set a great price upon the homage, love, and service of your poor frail human hearts, and this homage and service you render chiefly by the motives which regulate your conduct, and by the end you propose to yourselves, by making Him and His good pleasure and glory the object of all you do. In this way He becomes, to use the words of holy David, the God

of your heart (Psa. lxxii. 26). It is the heart which gives testimony of your love, for our Lord has said, 'Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also' (St. Matt. vi. 21). And this saying will lead you to the conclusion that, if those unworthy motives exist in your hearts, God does not occupy that place in your affections which He is entitled to, and which He demands, and that, as a necessary consequence, your lives are imperfect and need reform.

If this reasoning commends itself to you as right and conclusive, you will not deem this instruction out of place in the retreat. Its object is to make you ask yourselves if you are serving God for God's sake; it is intended to help you to renew your minds in true religiousness, and your lives in fervent activity, by the thought of the holy ends for which you are called to work. What energy is displayed by women of the world in pursuit of position or distinction or wealth! Be not less earnest in labouring for the glory of God, the good of your neighbour, and your own sanctification. If you seek other ends in your lives and by your labours, what was said by our Lord of the Pharisees may one day be said of you: 'Amen I say to you, they have received their reward.' Everyone looks to his own master for his reward, and for a reward proportionate to his labour. If you are the servants of God, you will look to God for the recompense of your service, and the day will come when you will hope to receive your reward. But what if you have unhappily been actuated by motives which have vitiated your service, and made it like that of the Pharisees?

You remember the history of Cardinal Wolsey, a great Churchman, but a greater statesman, and how his thought and aim were to please his sovereign. What was his reward? As long as his sovereign could use him for his own ends, he heaped favours upon him; but when Wolsey's conscience forbade him to go the whole length of formally abetting the king's wicked conduct, the favourite fell. How soon then was dissipated the glamour of his earthly greatness! Who then to do him honour? He died on his way to answer his arraignment, leaving to a reflecting world as a legacy the words, 'If I had only served my God as I have served my king, He would not have abandoned me in my gray hairs.' How different the case would have been if he had placed God before his eyes in all his projects and works!

Do not think little of the practice of purifying your intention; do not omit to renew your good intentions from time to time, even though the virtual intention, as it is called, may continue—that is, even though the intention by which you have consecrated to the glory of God all you do, not having been arrested or withdrawn, may still virtually exist. This renewal of your intention is a practice which will make you fervent and instigate you to fidelity, while it will also give supernatural value to your actions. Not only will those exercises which have direct relation to God's service be rendered meritorious by purity of intention, but also your commonest actions—your coming in and going out, your attention to your bodily wants, your recreations,

and all you do. What a comfort it will then afford you, to remember that this reward is accumulating day by day—a reward which will come to you from God, and be out of all keeping, in its measure and kind, with the little you do to deserve it.

You will not be denied this magnificent and everlasting reward, if you have really worked for God. How great it will be, and how worthy therefore of your present untiring efforts! Yes, day by day you are employed in the service of God, and the recompense which He will bestow will be one worthy of Himself. One picture of it is given by St. John, where, speaking of the city of the blessed, he says: 'The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. And they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; and they shall not need the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign for ever and ever' (Apoc. xxii. 3-5).

Keep this picture before your minds. You will not rob yourselves of this cherished recompense by labouring for unworthy ends, or by failing to direct your lives and actions to God by purity of intention. You may contrive to deceive your superiors and your sisters, and even yourselves; but you can never deceive your real Master, to whom you look for the reward of your service, Almighty God, 'who will render to every man according to his works' (Rom. ii. 6). Put away, then, all self-seeking and everything which can depreciate the value of

your good works and the accomplishment of your duty; with all earnestness and sincerity purify your intentions, and labour only for God, that you may be able to say, with all truthfulness: 'Whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's.'

IX.

HOLY OBEDIENCE.

'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.'—ST. LUKE i. 38.

As Mary submitted herself most perfectly to the Divine will, and expressed her entire conformity by these words addressed to the Angel, and thus became the instrument, in God's hands, of the stupendous mystery of the Incarnation, and the model of that blessed conformity which should be your highest aim; so do you, walking in the footsteps of your heavenly Queen and Mother, become in the measure of your holy vocation handmaids of our Lord by your vow of obedience. You have vowed poverty and chastity, but the consecration of yourselves to God is complete only when you have also vowed obedience, and thus consecrated your will to Him.

To have given Him your wealth and everything else, but to have retained your liberty of doing as you might please, would not have constituted a sacrifice satisfactory in His eyes; it would not have made you true religious.

How precious this vow of your will to God is, is seen in the merit with which it clothes all the actions of your religious life. While you act in conformity

with holy obedience, you acknowledge our Lord, your Divine Spouse, as your Master, and you obey Him in all you do. 'One is your Master, Christ' (St. Matt. xxiii. 10). Your whole life is spent in God's service, and your reward will be from His hands.

The excellence of this virtue proceeds, then, from the immolation of your will; but you have not injured yourselves by this immolation, your will has not thereby been rendered less perfect. On the contrary, you have thereby brought it to a high degree of perfection and have ennobled yourselves; for you have united your will to the Divine will, in submission to which you practise obedience. If St. Paul advises servants to obey their masters as though obeying God, in order to gain merit by their obedience, how much more earnestly should not you take his exhortation to yourselves, seeing that the spirit of your holy rule demands this perfection in your obedience! Your superiors represent in your regard, under ecclesiastical authority, Almighty God. St. Paul's exhortation is: 'Whatsoever you do, do it from the heart, as to the Lord, and not to men' (Col. iii. 23). What wonderful fruits of sanctification, and what rich and plentiful merits, result from true religious obedience! Your will, seeking only to obey the will of God, being thus united to it by a holy conformity, and thus worshiping the Divine will in a most perfect way, becomes sanctified and ennobled by this sacred union. This happy effect is not of a passing character, but is permanent by reason of the permanent character of

your obedience; for by your vow you have embraced a state of obedience. It may be said that your obedience has been sealed by your vow, and that your consecration by this vow is in response to the invitation of the Spouse, in the Canticles: 'Put Me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm.' No wonder, then, that St. Augustine gives obedience the first place among the virtues. His words are: 'Obedience is the greatest of the virtues, and, I may say, the origin and mother of them all' (Lib. contr. Advers. Legis.).

The excellence of this virtue may be seen also in this, that by obedience you control your own will. You know what a wayward faculty your will is, how it causes your falls and your follies. How you wish that you could place it in subjection! Well, this is done by your vow of obedience. 'An obedient man,' says Solomon, 'shall speak of victory' (Prov. xxi. 28). Your first victory, resulting from obedience, is over yourselves. This victory is renewed day by day in a good religious during the whole course of her life; she is no longer the plaything of her own fickle will, but she does the will of God, who marks out for her a wise and holy course of conduct.

The excellence of obedience is further seen in its utility as a means to an end. Every religious institute proposes to itself some end; this end will not be attained unless the members of the institute work for its attainment. It is absolutely necessary that there should be some means of insuring that the members should do this. That means is holy

obedience. Obedience binds you to the work; and this is good for you, good for the institute, and good for the end in view. That end is, according to the designs of God, whatever the institute has to accomplish. God uses the obedience to which He calls you, and which you promise to Him by vow, as the means for the sure attainment of that end. In this, therefore, are seen the wise fitness and utility of obedience in the religious life. And here, in passing, let me call to your mind that the institute to which you have the happiness to belong is not an imaginary kind of corporation, it is not an abstract body, but it is a living body of which you yourselves are the members, constituting its being and its life; so that it may be said that all the members form its body and soul, and fulfil its functions. From this it follows that you are not strangers to the noble works for the glory of God and the benefit of the Church to which your institute is devoted; but its works must be your works, just as by obedience your institute claims that your works shall belong to it, and be under its direction and control. As religious, then, you are not now so many separate individuals labouring for independent ends, but you are so many individuals incorporated into one religious body, labouring for ends common to all. Without obedience this would not be so.

The virtue of obedience has been ennobled by our Divine Lord's practice of it. He is the bright Pattern put before you for your imitation. Son of God as He is, by whom all things were made, to whom all are subject, and to whom the Father has

given judgment over all (St. John v. 22), He yet took the form of a servant, and became subject to His own creatures. 'He humbled Himself,' St. Paul tells us, 'becoming obedient unto death' (Phil. ii. 8). This was the will of His heavenly Father; it was enough for Him to know it, for His Father's will was dearer to Him than life. The first Adam brought ruin and dishonour upon our race by his disobedience; but Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, has brought us life and salvation by His obedience. Our Lord's obedience was a lifelong sacrifice of His own will to His heavenly Father's will, made known in the commands of Mary and Joseph and all others to whom and to whose laws He submitted Himself. Under this submission He embraced poverty, hardship, exile, toil, persecution, and suffering, 'becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.' This is the perfect Model whom the good religious places before herself; this is the bright Example which encourages her, and leads her even to heroism in her obedience. Christ is the Divine Head of the mystical body; you, and we all, are the members. He wishes obedience to be perpetuated in the Church, in His members, and so to be practised by the whole body.

That our Lord should have become obedient for your sakes is indeed a Divine wonder, but that you should become obedient for His sake is but a small token of the gratitude you owe Him; yet He is pleased to accept this token and to reward it. The obedience of a religious is her daily immolation; it is especially by the giving up of her own will that

she follows our Lord. Our Lord has said to her, as He said to the Apostles, 'Follow Me,' and the religious has obeyed. Our Lord has also said to her, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me' (St. Luke ix. 23). Again the religious has obeyed. These words tell you of what kind your obedience should be. You are not to expect everything to be arranged according to your own fancy and wish, but you must expect to have in many ways to give up your own will, to deny yourselves. There is little value in what costs you little or nothing, but much value and much merit where there is sacrifice.

You have only to call to mind what you have been taught, and what you find laid down in your holy rules, to understand the character of the obedience which is required in your institute. Should it not be prompt, humble, and willing? Should it not extend to every reasonable command and direction, provided only that there is nothing sinful in what you are required to do?

Your obedience will be highly meritorious if it has these qualities. And should it not have them, seeing that it is rendered, in God's name, to your superiors in religion who hold God's place in your regard? But your obedience will not be ready, humble, and entire if it is accompanied by murmurs, and accepted in such a way as to give pain to your superior; or if you meet your superior's order with persistent objections; or if you show such reluctance to comply with what is asked that she either does it

herself or imposes the duty on others. As to certain duties, it happens even that superiors are confronted by some reference to turns—'It isn't my turn to do this'—as though, because ordinarily these duties are arranged by an equal division or distribution, the superior's authority suffered limitation by such arrangement. This is far from being the case; for the system of turns or equal division of the duties having that sanction which the superior herself has given it, she may use in any other way the authority which is vested in her.

Religious obedience has also to be exercised in submitting in many ways to your superior's control, by going to her for many permissions. These matters are laid down in the rules of your institute, or in customs which have gained the force of law. You cannot fail to see how necessary to all obedience and religious submission humility is; yet religious are to be found who cannot bring themselves to ask their superior for anything, except when required to do so by the vow of poverty, and hardly even then. They are wanting in humility and in due respect for their superior and for the rule. How painful such conduct is to the superior! It is not always on personal, but on religious grounds that she feels pained by it. She sees the imperfection of the religious who act in this manner; she knows that these religious do various things for which her permission is needed, but not asked; she sees that her authority is slighted.

Bearing, we may suppose, upon a more serious phase of this matter of disregard of submission, we

read in the Life of Blessed Margaret Mary some words of terrible import addressed by our Lord to this His servant. Let me quote them for you, that you may reflect upon the lesson which they convey. 'Listen well,' He said, 'to these words from the lips of Truth. All religious separated and disunited from their superiors ought to regard themselves as vessels of reprobation, in which the best waters turn to corruption, the rays of the sun of grace producing on them the same effect as the natural sun produces upon muddy waters. These souls are rejected from My heart. The nearer they endeavour to approach to Me by the means of Sacraments, prayer, and other exercises, the further I remove Myself from them, through the horror I feel towards them; they will go from one hell to another. Such disunion has already ruined numbers, and will ruin many more in the end; since every superior holds My place, whether he be good or bad. For this reason, when the inferior thinks only of resisting authority, he is covering himself with so many mortal wounds. It is in vain to knock at the door of My mercy; he will not be listened to, unless I hear the voice of his superior.'

What the lax religious objects to is the exercise of any authority over her; but in reality the exercise of this authority is, in the providence of God, not only a means of her acquiring great merit, but is also a protection to her against what is faulty and dangerous in herself. In this you cannot fail to see the great use of obedience to you. What a safeguard it is, and what a source of comfort and

security! When you elect of yourselves to do anything, the responsibility of the choice rests with you, as also the responsibilities of your action and its consequences. This it is which gives rise to anxiety as to the rectitude, fittingness and results of what you do. Obedience, on the other hand, casts all this responsibility upon your superior; all you are asked to examine before you obey is if what you are asked to do is manifestly sinful or not. If it is not, then you have only to obey, and in every case, whether your action or the duty imposed upon you produces the results desired or not, there is always a gain for you—namely, the merit of obedience. What a comfort for you to be free from all anxiety, and from all risk, danger and responsibility, while at the same time you merit the reward of the virtuous action on your part!

But note that the amount or degree of your merit in this case, as in all other cases, will depend upon the character or quality of your obedience. If it has all the perfection which your holy rule insists upon, the merit will be very great, and your advancement in perfection, albeit that you remain lowly in your own eyes and in the eyes of others, will be proportionately rapid. I ask you also to note that, in order to obtain great merit, the duty which you perform under obedience need not be of vast importance, provided that you hold yourselves indifferent as to your employment; for it is rather the spirit of your service than the matter of it which is rewarded.

Do you remember the reproof which Saul received

from the prophet Samuel, when he had immolated victims to God, instead of waiting for the priest to arrive to do this? 'Doth the Lord,' said Samuel, 'desire holocausts and victims, and not rather that the voice of the Lord should be obeyed? For obedience is better than sacrifices' (1 Kings xv. 22). That your conduct may be meritorious, it behoves you to recognise the voice of God in the arrangements of your superiors and in the requirements of your holy rule, thus to secure for your actions the highest merit.

I am sure that disobedience in any pronounced form is rare, if not entirely unknown, among you. If, then, I ask you to meditate upon the subject, and to examine yourselves upon it, it is rather with a view to impress you with the conviction of the excellence and utility of obedience, and to invite you to take steps to perfect your observance of this virtue, than to call attention to its absence from amongst you. Direct and grave disobedience would indeed be a scandal in any community. Whatever your faults may be, you, at any rate, strive to save your vows from violation.

But do not misunderstand the gravity of such disobedience. A subject who refuses to obey her superior arrogates to herself the right to command; she, as it were, wrenches the reins from out of her superior's hands, and takes them up herself. But by whose authority? All right authority is of God. In this case there is no authority, there is an opposition to authority; the action is bad, and cannot be of God. 'Let every soul,' says St. Paul, 'be subject

to higher powers: for there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist, purchase to themselves damnation' (Rom. xiii. 1, 2). Our Lord's words to Blessed Margaret Mary, which I just now quoted, must refer to direct and grave disobedience, which classes with disobedience to the ordinance of God.

Disobedience is the great stumbling-block which leads to apostasy. Apostates resist the Church, apostates, too, resist their religious superiors; then comes the fall. How many grave scandals would the Church have been spared if only religious had loved and practised obedience and dutiful submission! On the plea of wounded innocence, self-respect, superior knowledge, injured rights, or zeal for reform, apostates have rebelled against right authority. I only point out this stumbling-block that you may perceive it, and recognise the danger and evil of it, and therefore carefully avoid it. But I am sure that you all are in your hearts persuaded that disobedience never leads to any good, and that religious obedience leads to every good. To this obedience you are happily bound by vow. You are not released from your obligations even if sometimes superiors are wrong. Yes, it may indeed happen that sometimes superiors make mistakes; but, let me ask, in how many cases is the disobedience of subjects justified?

In view of your obligations, I invite you to obey your superiors readily and fully; strive to lighten and

render pleasant the responsibility cast upon them. 'Obey your prelates,' says St. Paul, 'and be subject to them. For they watch as being to render an account of your souls, that they may do this with joy, and not with grief. For this is not expedient for you' (Heb. xiii. 17).

To obey as good religious requires great virtue. With the best will in the world, you will yet feel at times great difficulty in obeying. It is especially on such difficult occasions that you will need to call to mind your obligations, and the example of our Divine Lord, and to pray for the grace necessary to you. Upon such difficult occasions, let me beg of you not to speak without reflection, and not to act without prayer. It is not pretended that obedience will be always easy and natural to you. It is, however, for our Lord's sake that you obey; ask yourselves how you will best please Him. Where you meet with the greatest reluctance on the part of nature and self-love, there must grace assert itself, and bring your resisting will into subjection. When the struggle is over, and victory rests with grace, then will God reward you with His consolations.

Let me, in conclusion, exhort you to love this exalted virtue of holy obedience, and to set high value upon it. You will at the close of the retreat renew your vow to obey. You will once more, and with great fervour, renew your lifelong immolation; but by this sacrifice of your will you do not yield to the enemy, you set him at defiance: you submit yourselves most perfectly to the most just, holy, and wise will of God; you become formidable to your

enemy the devil, and victorious over what is wayward and ill-regulated in yourselves. I may then be permitted to address to you, in words of special application to you, the words of St. Paul: 'Being now made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end life everlasting' (Rom. vi. 22).

Persevere, then, in your edifying spirit of obedience. Let your victory over your will be daily and permanent. 'To him that shall overcome,' says our Blessed Lord, 'I will give to sit with Me in My throne' (Apoc. iii. 21). God grant that by your religious obedience you may merit this glorious reward!

X.

DEATH.

'Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour.'—ST. MATT. xxv. 13.

I INVITE you to concentrate your thoughts this evening upon the serious subject of death—upon your own death. You know how important it is for you to die well; you do not wish for an unprovided end; you would like your house to be well in order when your time comes; what, then, so reasonable as to give the subject your attention during the retreat? Who knows but that perhaps, in the good providence of God, the graces of this short retreat are to have a very important bearing upon the kind of death you will eventually, sooner or later, die? Perhaps during this retreat you will realize, as you have not done before, that your whole life should be a preparation for death; that the character of your death will be settled by, and correspond with, the character of your life: for the conviction will strike you that the bad religious dies, it is to be feared, a bad death, the indifferent religious dies an indifferent death; but that the good religious dies a good death, and the saintly religious dies a saintly death. To put

this thought in everyday parlance, which is striking, though scarcely respectful to so grave a subject: Just as you travel first, second, or third class by railway, according to the carriage which you enter, so, as a rule, and apart from the special dispensations of grace, persons die in those dispositions in which they have served God during life. Would you feel hurt if I were to ask you which of you would wish or be content to die in indifferent dispositions? I of course, with you, reject the thought, the bare idea, of any of you dying a bad death—'The death of the wicked is very evil' (Psa. xxxiii. 22), says holy David; and I know you would answer emphatically: 'No one would like to die in indifferent dispositions.' You would, one and all, like to make a holy end, and to pass at once into the joys of eternal life. But, let me ask, how can you expect this desired consummation if your lives are not in keeping with it; if, to use railway parlance once more, you are in a different carriage, or running on quite another line?

The thought of death, and what decides its kind or character, and therefore its consequences upon your future destiny, should, if seriously considered, move you to give your lives such a direction as shall, God being willing, secure for you a happy and holy end.

That you have all to die, just as you have yourselves seen others die, needs no proof; but you must yet think of death, persuade yourselves of its certainty, and bear it in mind. 'The end of all things is at hand.'

What shall we say of it ? Death is the absolute and complete cessation of life in this world ; and it is the only gate by which we can enter into the world to come. It is the separation of soul from body, and the dissolution of our present condition of being, to which condition the union of soul and body is absolutely essential. Death knows no half-measures or compromise ; it may be termed 'the great reality.' Life may be prolonged, so that death may be said to have delayed and to be long a-coming —but come it will and must ; it cannot turn aside, it will yet claim its victim ; it is 'the great inevitable.' It is more than a disease. If you suffer from the most acute and dangerous form of disease, medical science may find a remedy, and you may be saved ; but once death has taken place, the doctor arrives and shakes his head, saying : 'She is gone, she is dead ; there is nothing to be done.' Only just now she spoke, and saw, and heard, and smiled, and felt, and moved ; but now her body is without movement, or pulsation, or sensation ; it is but a relic of the dead. A relic ? Yes ; but an undesirable one. Put it out of sight, bury it deep in the earth ; soon it shall be the food of worms and all corruption. This is death.

Do you remember the effect produced upon St. Francis Borgia by the sight of the corpse of the Empress Isabella ? So altered was her body a few days after death that St. Francis failed to recognise it as that of his late sovereign. 'What,' he exclaimed, 'have now become those eyes once so sparkling ? Where is now the beauty and grace of that counte-

nance which we beheld but such a short time ago? Are you her sacred majesty, the Donna Isabella?' Leaving the spectacle, he retired to his apartments to reflect in silence and tears upon what he had seen. 'What is it, my soul,' he said, 'that I seek in the world? How long shall I pursue and grasp at shadows? What has she already become who was but now so beautiful, so great, so much revered? This death, which has thus treated the imperial diadem, has already levelled its blow to strike me. Would it not be prudent to prevent its stroke by dying now to the world, that at my death I may live to God?' He wisely carried out his resolution by entering the religious state.

Another thought is this: death will close your relations with everything in the world, if we except only that 'uncertain quantity,' the charity which may be displayed towards you by the prayers and suffrages of the few who will remember you. This snapping of the bonds adds to the anguish of death in the case of the avaricious. 'O death,' writes Ecclesiasticus, 'how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions!' (xli. 1). At death you will part from the house you lived in, the chapel you prayed in, the scenes which surrounded you, the sisters who laboured with you, the friends who esteemed you, the crowds you passed through, the room you occupied, the books you used, the faces you saw, the voices you heard. To you they will be no more, and you will be no more to them. Death will remove you absolutely from all these; it is the 'great parting,' the departure

which shall not be succeeded by a return, for you will go, never to come back. 'So man,' said Job, 'when he is fallen asleep, shall not rise again till the heavens be broken; he shall not awake, nor rise up out of his sleep' (xiv. 12). Call to mind, besides these words, what David said when his child had died: 'Shall I be able to bring him back any more? I shall go to him rather; but he shall not return to me' (2 Kings xii. 23).

Take, as a final thought, this: death is universal. Not to speak of the first inhabitants of the globe, or those who first peopled your own country—where, I ask, are the men and women, the kings and queens, the distinguished statesmen, generals, and scholars, the devout priests and nuns, who flourished in the very last century? Where the pious religious who first flourished in your holy institute? Where many of your sisters, whom you yourselves have known, and some who dwelt in the very convent which you now occupy? Where many of the friends of your childhood, where dear relatives whose place is now found no more? Gone—dead! All past generations have paid the penalty of sin; even Enoch and Elias, who have been reserved by God for a special mission, have escaped the universal law only for the period divinely appointed. You may say: yet the world is still alive with men. Yes; but those who live to-day shall, before another century has passed, be as dead as their forefathers—and we all, you and I, with them. 'It is appointed unto all men to die'; the law is universal.

You, as well as myself, will one day have to face

the ordeal. The time will come, sooner or later, when it will be told you that your sickness is very serious. Happy you, if you are fervent and well prepared when these tidings are conveyed to you. You may receive them at a time when you have many plans for work before you, and little dream that the end is near, and when you perhaps fancy that you will be quite well again in a few days' time. You may receive these tidings when you are living in a careless manner, when your minds are in a state of chronic dissipation, or, even worse, when you have unhappily fallen into a condition of tepidity bordering on mortal sin. Again, this alarming information may be sprung upon you when your time has long been engrossed by engagements and pursuits quite outside the duties of your religious calling; or when you are perhaps secretly intriguing to bring about some change which you desire, or to attain some position which it would have been better that you had not even thought of; or, again, when you have been overcome by some predominant failing. Finally, this warning of your danger may be given you when you are promising yourselves yet many years more to live. 'Be you then also ready: for at what hour you think not, the Son of Man will come' (St. Luke xii. 40). 'Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour.'

Let us hope that, through timidity or false charity, your sisters may not deceive you as the prophet Eliseus deceived Benadad, the King of Syria. When the messenger came to the prophet to ask if

the king would recover from his sickness, Eliseus replied: 'Go tell him, Thou shalt recover: but the Lord hath shown me that he shall surely die' (4 Kings viii. 10).

Between the receiving of the warning and the end, how little time will intervene! Sometimes it is a matter of only a few days, often of only a few hours—all too short for the work of vital importance to eternity which has to be done in those quickly passing moments. 'Blessed,' said our Lord, 'are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching' (St. Luke xii. 37).

Death is the gate by which you will have to enter into the world to come. 'But man,' said Job, 'when he shall be dead and stripped, and consumed, I pray you where is he?' (xiv. 10). Nowhere, as far as this world is concerned; but his soul has been launched into eternity. 'Man,' says Solomon, 'shall go into the house of his eternity' (Eccles. xii. 5). His soul, once released from the trammels of the body, stands before God, arraigned before His dread tribunal. The veil has been lifted. While in this world, his soul lay hidden under the cover of the body; the cover has now been cast aside, the soul stands unveiled in its beauty or in its deformity. It has lost nothing of its life, nor is it deprived of its intellectual faculties; but it has passed from the period of trial, of meritorious work and fruitful repentance. In this sense, therefore, will death be to you the gate to the life to come.

If now you ask yourselves when you will die, you propose a question to which a definite answer cannot

be found, other than the certainty of the uncertainty of the time of your death. This is why you are told to be ever prepared, ever on the watch; and nothing could be so unwise, perhaps so fatal, as to neglect this salutary warning. Have you never hinted the warning to others? perhaps you need it most yourselves. 'Watch ye, therefore,' our Lord says to you, 'because you know not the day nor the hour.'

We read how Samuel, thirty-eight years before his death, made his reckoning with Israel, addressing the people in these words: 'I am old and gray-headed, having conversed with you from my youth unto this day; behold here I am. Speak of me before the Lord, and before His anointed, whether I have taken any man's ox or ass: if I have oppressed any man . . . They said: Thou hast not wronged us or oppressed us.' Samuel asked their testimony as to his life, as though he would then set his house in order. You have to reckon not with man, but with God. It is not too soon to prepare yourselves to do it. Do not delay putting your house in order; and if you may not ask for testimony from without, you can always seek the witness of your conscience within. Have you wronged God, or man, or your own souls? Have you fulfilled your duties as faithfully as Samuel fulfilled his, so that your sisters or your superiors, or those under your charge, could not, if asked, upbraid you with neglect or omission? 'Thou hast not wronged us or oppressed us.'

Now indeed is the time, and not when you will

be laid prostrate by your last sickness—now is the time when you should prepare for death. You would wish then your preparation to be good, to be the best possible. But then your mind, if you possess your faculties at all, will most probably be engrossed with your ailments and bodily needs; then you will be incapable, if you be conscious, of doing more than to utter an ejaculatory prayer and an act of resignation; then your time will be short, and the moments in which you will be able to pray may be few; then, if your sickness has come suddenly upon you, you will have but little, if any, opportunity of giving edification and repairing scandal; then you may be so alarmed at your condition that all devotion will fly from you, and a sad uneasiness may stamp itself upon your countenance and manifest itself in your words; then, although you may need much encouragement and help, the serious nature of your sickness may necessitate the precaution of your being kept absolutely quiet, and but few words may be spoken to you. Ah, it will not do to depend, for your preparation for death and eternity, upon those few uncertain moments of final consciousness, during which it is quite possible that pain and weakness may render you unfit for any effort. This was never intended. The best possible preparation for death is a good life, and for religious a good religious life—that is, a life in which you persevere in exemplary conduct, in the faithful fulfilment of the duties of your state, in piety, and in the practice of the religious virtues.

Do you doubt this? Do you believe it? If,

happily, such is your life, then, whether death comes early or late, you will be ready. You remember how, out of the ten virgins of the parable, only five were wise; and these, when the Bridegroom came, had their lamps ready, and they 'went in with Him to the marriage' (St. Matt. xxv. 10). You know that you have to count upon death coming when you least expect it; even so, it will not find you unprepared. 'Let your loins be girt, and lamps burning in your hands, and you yourselves like to men who wait for their lord' (St. Luke xii. 35, 36).

But has it ever happened to you to entertain misgivings about any religious lying on her death-bed? Or have you ever heard such remarks as the following made confidentially in an undertone about one when death had carried her off: 'What a pity Sister So-and-so was so hard to live with!' 'What a pity Sister So-and-so was not more pious and regular!' 'Poor Sister So-and-so will have some account to give for all the misunderstandings she caused.' 'How regrettable that Sister So-and-so had that unfortunate weakness!' 'Poor Sister So-and-so showed some piety; but it was a pity she meddled with other people's concerns, and turned others against her.' 'Poor Sister So-and-So was not bad-hearted, but she had a very disagreeable temper.' 'Poor Sister So-and-so is gone; we must pray for her; there is an end now to her intrigues.' I only surmise these reckonings-up, and put them before you, that you may reflect and admit that it would have been better and more satisfactory if there had been no cause for misgiving; also that you may

note how these observations manifest the dis-edification which the religious had been giving perhaps for long years. None of you would wish such remarks to be made about you; then, do not give the occasion.

How different your feelings, how consoling your appreciations, in the case of the good religious awaiting her call! You look upon her as the devout servant of God, the faithful spouse of Christ, who has done her work, who is found watching, and who is going to her reward. You call to mind the hope-inspiring words of the psalmist, 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints' (Psa. cxv. 15). Precious before God is the death, not of those who have given way to their passions, who have loved the world, or who have followed foolishness—no; but the death of His Saints, of those who have 'loved justice and hated iniquity.' You feel that what was said by the mother of St. Symphorien to her son when on his way to a glorious martyrdom is to be realized also in the case of this edifying religious: 'Life is not taken away from thee, but changed to a life that is better.' Oh, happy change! It shall be the exchange of grace for glory; her charity shall blossom into eternal life! The happy moment of her triumph is drawing near. She has been humble; she shall be exalted. She has tasted sorrow; it shall be changed into joy. Jesus Christ, who has won the victory in His own Person, must triumph also in every one of His elect. 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy

sting?' (1 Cor. xv. 54, 55). Depart, O servant of God, in peace!

Such is the death which you hope for yourselves; the preparation, then, must be in accordance with it. Must that be said of you who are consecrated to God which was said by Moses of the fickle Israelites?—'They are a nation without counsel and without wisdom. O that they would be wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end!' (Deut. xxxii. 28, 29). Will you neglect your work of preparation in the mid-day of life, and then at its close be filled with alarm, exclaiming, 'Woe unto us, for the day is declined, for the shadows of the evening are grown longer'? (Jer. vi. 4). No; you have thought of death; your whole life in religion is a preparation for it. But in the light of the considerations which I have put before you, and with the conviction now weighing upon you that the character of your death is likely to be in keeping with the character of your lives, now is the time to ask yourselves if you are satisfied with your past and present preparation. This is the question which I ask you to put to yourselves during your meditation to-morrow morning. And I exhort you, with all charity and solicitude, not to neglect to put off your remote (as it is called) preparation for a happy death. You have it in your power to save yourselves from many regrets at the solemn moment of death. Your action determined upon now may prove the source of sweet consolation then, when you will cast about for anything and everything likely to comfort you and to strengthen your hope

of a favourable judgment. How much, as death will gain rapidly upon you in your last sickness, will you deplore your sins, your remissness, and your want of fervour, fidelity, and zeal! How much you will wish that you could live your lives over again! What a true view you will then take of the blessings offered to you in the religious life! What keen regret you will then feel that you have not done and suffered more for God! Then indeed shall sin impress you with a truer sense of its deformity and of its evil consequences, while you will realize the truth of the words of Solomon (Eccles. xii. 13), that to 'fear God and keep His commandments is all man'—that is, all man need care about. Then will you be fully convinced that you should not have lived to live, but have lived to die; that life was only leading up to death, the great goal of existence. Please God, there shall be no false step, and no delusion or pretence about your preparation.

And now, in drawing our considerations to a conclusion, let me address you in the words of the prophet Jeremias: 'Give ye glory to the Lord your God before it be dark, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains' (xiii. 16). Perhaps, for some among you, the sombre mountains are already casting longer shadows, and the night is nearer than you think.

Thank God, you are religious not unmindful of your duties; you belong to a fervent community, and you are imbued with the spirit of your institute; your lives are spent in useful and holy work. Well, the bright haven of peace lies before you: set your

sails for it, keep it in view. The sails are holy desires, firm resolutions to do good. The chart you must sail by is the way, not only of God's commandments, but also the way of the holy counsels and the religious life. The compass is an enlightened conscience. With due attention to the sails, the chart, and the compass, you will sail on and reach the port. A happy death will be to you the holy haven of everlasting peace. There you will land upon the eternal shore, and enter into your heavenly Father's house. O sweet and consoling hope! Be faithful, then, and persevere, and be filled with the sentiments of holy David when he sang, 'I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the house of the Lord' (Psa. cxxi. 1).

FOURTH DAY.

XI.

OBSERVANCE OF RULE.

'Let not these things depart from thy eyes: keep the law and the counsel: and there shall be life to thy soul.'—PROV. iii. 21, 22.

YOUR rules are so far bound up with your religious perfection, that it may safely be asserted that if you despise your rules, you despise your religious perfection; if you neglect your rules, you neglect your religious perfection. Although your rules do not, each one, bind you to observance under pain of sin, you must yet try to keep them faithfully, and must especially guard yourselves against anything like systematic neglect of your rule, for by such neglect you would give serious scandal, and your conduct would be injurious to religious discipline, and therefore not without sin. The teaching of theology is that frequent and notable transgression of the rules, even of such as are not of themselves binding under sin, may become sinful, and even grievously sinful,

by reason of scandal, or of the relaxing of religious discipline.*

When you consider how much the observance of your rules protects and assists you in your spiritual life, it is hard to reconcile systematic neglect of rule with that tending to perfection which is a strict obligation of your state. At any rate, you must admit that the truly devout are known always to be lovers and observers of rule; you must also acknowledge that the religious who keeps her rule is an edifying religious; and you rightly believe that she will receive the reward both of her observance and of the edification which she gives by it.

You must not lose sight of the duty of edification. On the one hand, you are obliged to acknowledge that neglect of rule may become sinful, because of the scandal given by it. On the other hand, you have the consolation of knowing that your observance of rule will be very meritorious, because of the edification which it will give. The spiritual life in yourselves and in others is ever under the influence of external agencies: scandal is detrimental to it, edification is beneficial to it. You are ever making some impression on those who are round about you; this impression is good or bad, and you will be held

* See Lehmkuhl, vol. i., No. 516. The following passages occur in Suarez ('De Oblig. Relig.'): 'Si quis sciens et videns, longo tempore deficit ab observatione totius regulæ, habet plus quam virtualem consensum non proficiendi in perfectione secundum suam regulam; ergo si formalis est peccatum mortale, etiam et virtualis.'

'Si quis intendat non esse solicitus in observatione regulæ, dispositio hæc est peccatum mortale.'

accountable for it. You know that the impression made by a religious who neglects the obligations of her rule is a bad one. If that religious is a superior, who both neglects these obligations herself and suffers their neglect in others, the matter becomes even more reprehensible.

Let me remark that I do not wish, in this conference, to stretch the culpability of breach of rule beyond what is strictly laid down in moral theology; but you have to be guided not only by moral theology, but also by mystic theology; you have to consider the bearing of your neglect upon your spiritual life.

Now, this time of your retreat is one in which to study your duty with regard to your holy rules and religious observances, and to apply a remedy to any neglect or shortcomings which you may discover in your conduct. Be resolved, at least, to have a good will to do what you can to keep your rules; but, as a preliminary to your earnestness in forming this resolution, you should be impressed by a proper appreciation of the rules and observances of your holy institute.

I need not say that, in the main, it is the vows of religion which constitute the difference between secular persons and persons consecrated to God in religion; but as far as public opinion goes, religious are distinguished from seculars by their rule of life. In religious orders of men, the members are called regulars because they follow a rule. So you have to acknowledge the important bearing which your holy rules have upon the essential obligations of the religious life; they are, indeed, to be looked upon as

an outer bulwark to protect your vows, and as a means to help you to fulfil your obligation of tending to perfection. Your holy rules are a protection to your vows, especially because of their disciplinary effect.

To observe your vows, you must practise self-restraint and self-sacrifice. The undisciplined religious, following her own whims, and become a law to herself, will not always be prepared for the restraint, and giving up of self-will, demanded by her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; she does not make the proper preparation for all that these vows expect of her. If she takes unnecessary repose either by night or by day; if she rises in the morning to suit her own convenience; if she neglects meditation and the other religious observances required by the rule; if she shows but little respect to her superiors, and but scant courtesy to her sisters, while perhaps she is very friendly with secular persons; if she has no relish for the duties appointed for her; if she takes, however, great pleasure in seeing persons in the parlour, and in long and frequent gossiping; if she resents every attempt to correct her conduct; if she conceals her projects and her movements from her superior; if she tries to cause dissension in the community or form parties in it; if she habitually breaks silence, and causes others to do so; if she is immortified, and difficult to please as to diet; if she has a habit of grumbling, and strives to spread discontent—how, I ask, is such a religious prepared to observe all that her sacred obligations of a strict poverty, a perfect chastity, and an entire obedience

demand? Will she seek the requisite permissions in lending, borrowing, giving, receiving, keeping and using, necessary in the observance of her vow of poverty? Will she not presume permissions even when her superior is at hand, and even perhaps in matters when no permission would or could reasonably be granted? Will she not undertake to make many matters, as to poverty, all right with her conscience, even when her action is inexcusable? As to the obligations of chastity, such a religious is liable to various faults. Owing to her immortification, if not also to unguardedness, and owing to her want of piety, it is possible that the delicate flower of a perfect chastity may be affected by a wandering imagination or a too sensitive affection, or in other ways. Lastly, as to the obligations of obedience, how can it be said that a religious so independent of control understands them? Will she not be a constant thorn in the side of her superiors? Will she not frequently strive to bring her superior to require her to do just what she herself is determined to do? What shirking of duty and what murmuring she will be guilty of! How many faults there will be against the virtue of obedience, if not strictly against the vow!

It must therefore be admitted that such an undisciplined religious is but little prepared for the proper observance of her vows. Would it surprise any of her sisters if she were eventually to be guilty of some notable breach of her religious obligations? You have perhaps heard of religious who began by disregarding the wise and useful prescriptions of

their rule, and who ended by seeking a dispensation from their vows. 'Undisciplined souls have erred' (Wisd. xvii. 1).

Let me now invite you to turn from this picture, to see, on the other hand, how beneficial is the effect of observance of rule. The good religious—by the discipline of exact observance, which is to her a sweet yoke—is schooled to that piety, that guardedness, that conscientiousness, that firmness of principle, that honesty of purpose, that self-sacrifice, and that devotedness to a religious life, which practically insure her faithful observance of her vows. She may feel confident that, when there is a question of keeping her vows, God, who will reward her spirit of observance, and who will bestow innumerable graces upon her, will then support, inspire and guide her. While the outer bulwarks are well guarded, the citadel will be safe.

I have said that fidelity to rule is, first, a protection to your vows, and, secondly, a means to help you to fulfil your obligation of tending to perfection. It remains for me to consider this second view of the importance of the rules.

There is an undoubted obligation upon religious to tend to perfection. I need not dwell here upon what precise amount of neglect of rule would show that a religious had ceased to tend to perfection; the point I ask you to consider is this, that the observance of your rules manifests that you are fulfilling this essential obligation; while your disregard of them would show that you are not truly in earnest or anxious for your perfection.

Theologians lay down that a religious is bound to tend to perfection by the observance of the vows and constitutions of her institute; therefore there is, according to them, an obligation of obedience to the rules, as far as this tending to perfection demands it. The good religious wishes to please God, and to sanctify her soul by a full and faithful compliance with all the obligations of her state; and she recognises that these obligations extend not only to keeping her vows, but also to observing her rules. She sees that the prescriptions of her rule provide for hearing Mass every day, for the reception of the holy sacraments, for meditation and prayer, for various devout practices, for a community life, and for an exterior deportment in keeping with her vocation. She recognises the wisdom of all these prescriptions, and how, if only she fulfils them faithfully, she cannot but advance in perfection. She sees that they are suitable to the life and vocation to which she has been called, and that her observance of them will form her for her vocation, sustain her in it, and aid her perseverance. Convinced of all this, she will appreciate and love her rules, and observe them. She is not a religious who will ask how far she may disregard them without sin. As a happy result of her observance of rule, she will continue to be a good religious, content with her vocation, and she will advance steadily in the way of perfection.

But where, let me ask, is the zeal for her perfection in the undisciplined religious, whose conduct I but now attempted to depict, in a

religious who does not observe the horarium of her community, who absents herself from meditation and other religious observances, who makes her spiritual reading badly, or even neglects it, and who also disregards many other prescriptions of her rule bearing upon her conduct in and out of her convent? She finds time for receiving useless visits, for unprofitable reading, for extended relaxation, for gossip, for sleep; but where is her piety, her self-restraint, her devotedness to duty? Will not her conduct create some misgiving as to her tending to perfection? We ask if she is not rather going backwards than going forwards; and if many venial sins are not committed in such a manner of life; and, finally, if such a religious has not reason to be alarmed by the kind of life which she is leading?

What should be thought of a soldier who wore indeed a military uniform, but who did not attend the drill or other military exercises? He could not be looked upon as a good soldier. And what shall we think of the undisciplined religious? No matter what may be her amiability of character, or her talents, or her accomplishments, or the number and attachment of her friends, we must say that she is not a good religious, as she fails in observance, and neglects striving to obtain the perfection of her state.

I now invite you to make an examination as to the observance of some of the wise requirements of your rule; you can complete it yourselves.

We have considered in another instruction the duty of meditation. How do you fulfil this duty?

Do you absent yourselves without sufficient reason? Do you spend the time of meditation in performing other devotions, or in making your plans for the day?

Are you exact in making your spiritual reading? Do you devote to this exercise the full time prescribed? This useful study furnishes the mind and heart with matter in the ascetic order; it is a powerful aid towards forming you to conventual life; it puts before you so many valuable lessons and useful examples; it feeds piety and prepares you for trials and temptations; it supplies you with a fund of instruction. Spiritual reading should, then, be made with care, attention, and reflection, that you may derive the necessary profit from it.

Do you visit the Blessed Sacrament? Do you realize what this visit means, and do you strive to make it with an earnest affection of piety? What a precious treasure, and what a sweet consolation, the Blessed Sacrament is to all the children of the Church, but especially to religious! Do you, when before the holy Tabernacle, open your heart with a lively faith to our Lord, and pray fervently for all your needs? I do not need to invite you to examine yourselves about your assisting at holy Mass; all I say is, be on your guard against familiarity and a careless routine. Holy Communion and confession will be considered in separate conferences.

Do you recite your rosary with profit? This devotion, if performed with piety, is a very treasury of spiritual goods, an album of devout and instruc-

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tive pictures, a garden of fragrant blossoms. It brings Jesus and Mary, and sometimes St. Joseph, before you in scenes which you should never tire of contemplating; you have them under your gaze, you listen to their words, you study their conduct, you admire their virtues, you see what has been done for your sanctification and salvation, and you feel your heart moved to worship, to praise, and to love. Do you ever omit your rosary?

Are you faithful in acquainting your superior with your occupations, and in seeking her sanction for your undertakings? Are you careful to go to her under all the circumstances which your rule lays down? Do you recognise her authority over you in everything, except in matters of ecclesiastical jurisdiction?

Finally, examine yourselves upon the subject of self-restraint in speaking and criticising; also as to mortification, as to your meals, and, lastly, as to spending your time profitably. Complete the examination with your rule-book before you. This book should be your rule of life, as it manifests what God requires you to do in order to please Him and to acquire the perfection of your state. If at times you find it difficult to carry out all the requirements of your holy rules, let there be always some legitimate excuse, so that you may not be at fault, and so that no scandal may be given.

Put before you the example of those members of your holy institute who have given edification and won respect by their observance of the rule. It was to them fruitful in their own personal sanctification;

it diffused around them the good odour of religious virtue; it gave efficacy and unction to the works they took in hand, and it gained for them untold merit. Be not drawn aside from observance such as theirs happily was, by fickleness, by sloth, by want of generosity, by bad example or insidious advice, or by secular claims; but let your observance be loyal, affectionate, and constant. Offer it to our Lord as a token of your love; pledge it to your institute as a proof of your devotedness. Then will you experience that the yoke is sweet and the burden light. 'Let not these things depart from thy eyes: keep the law and the counsel, and there shall be life to thy soul.'

And now, in conclusion, let me remind you that the maintenance of religious discipline—which is inseparable from the religious life—depends upon the compliance of all, and therefore individual members fall under the obligation of this compliance. If every individual religious was free to do as she pleased, there would be no discipline.

This is the age of trades unions, and of combinations for mutual protection. Let me urge upon you also to club together for the protection of your institute and of one another; your holy rules enforce common action. Your compliance with them ought to correspond with your respect for and attachment to the religious life, to which life you acknowledge with thankfulness you have been called by God's special goodness and mercy. Let all then, in God's name, love and respect the discipline of religion, and the rules which maintain it. How much depends

upon your united compliance! You can, if you so wish, make your convent a house of good religious; but, alas! if you neglect your rule, you may make it a house of dissipation and disorder.

For the honour of religion generally, and of your holy institute, and for the sake of your own merit and sanctification, I exhort you, then, to maintain the spirit of observance among you, and to show yourselves to be fervent religious by dutiful fidelity to your holy rules. This fidelity will be a practical test of your love of God and of your calling; it will save you from many faults and dangers; it will bring many blessings upon your present life, and make smooth your path to the heavenly reward. 'Keep the law and the counsel, and there shall be life to thy soul.'

XII.

CONFESSION.

'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.'—
1 St. John i. 8.

An important duty of every week is your confession. It is necessary on account of your frailty, and on account of the purity of conscience demanded by your assistance at daily Mass, by your frequent reception of the Holy Communion, and by your consecration to God. Great Saints have sought sacramental absolution every day; the least you can do is to approach the holy Sacrament of Penance once a week; such is the custom in religious institutes. There is no more efficacious remedy against sin than this Sacrament, and no greater help to purity of soul. You should therefore highly appreciate it, and you should avail yourselves most dutifully of so inestimable a benefit. What an evidence this Sacrament of reconciliation affords you of God's unspeakable mercy, and of His tender and paternal love and compassion! The arms of His mercy are open to you, not once only, but as often as, touched with true sorrow for sin, you fly to them, and so often, as though in the saving bath

of the Precious Blood, does He wash out your sins, removing the guilt from your stained souls. Because the remedy is thus ever at hand, you must not think less of the guilt of sin, though it be only venial, nor of your absolute need of pardon. You depend for pardon, not upon any merit of yours, but upon the mercy of God, and upon the application to your souls of the merits of our Lord's passion and death.

If you examine the steps which you have to take to secure so desirable and necessary a boon as the forgiveness of your offences against God, what do you find? You might indeed inquire: Where shall you seek the tribunal? Who is its minister? What lengthy process has to be employed? What heavy charges have to be incurred? How long shall you have to wait before the sentence is pronounced? What difficulties stand in the way? How many persons will hear your accusation? Shall your faults be registered, and to whom shall the register be open for inspection? By what heavy penalty shall you be required to expiate your offences? There is nothing of all this.

You perceive the excess of our Lord's goodness in the facility with which your pardon may be obtained. Any priest holding jurisdiction, and approved as your confessor, can absolve you. You kneel beside him without being observed; you confess your sins in secret, and he is bound by the strictest obligation to respect your secret; he imposes a light penance, and then pronounces the words of absolution. Because the forgiveness of

your sins may be obtained with so little trouble, and upon such easy terms, is this to be treated as a reason why you should fail to seek it? Would you, I may ask, be more eager for it if it would cost you more to obtain it? Ah, no; be sensible, then, of our Lord's consideration for you in all that concerns your reconciliation. See and remark how the case stands. Through frailty you sin; even though your sin be only venial, it has its malice and its indignity. You incur guilt and punishment; do you not wish to be relieved from this evil, from your sin and its consequences? The evil will remain except you repent of your sin and receive pardon.

You will bear with me if I now dwell for a few moments, by way of warning to you, upon a case which, happily, is very rare; I refer to the case of a religious who does not appreciate weekly confession. I will suppose that this religious says to herself: 'The fact is, I don't see why I should go to confession once a week, for I have nothing to confess.' At first sight this reasoning may seem plausible; but when it is examined, even if it have solid grounds, which is doubtful, it will be found scarcely to merit our respect. Why? Because the holy Sacrament of Penance imparts special graces, besides the increase of sanctifying or habitual grace, if it be received with proper dispositions, even by those who are not conscious of any deliberate venial sin; provided that the requirements of the Sacrament be met by the confession of some sufficient matter, namely, some deliberate sin or kind of sin, whether

mortal or venial, of one's past life, with a renewal of sorrow for it and purpose to avoid sin in the future. This, as you know, is what theologians teach. You cannot, therefore, fail to recognise how wisely it is required of you to avail yourselves of the grace of the Sacrament of Penance once a week, even though you may not be conscious of having committed any deliberate sin. Then, again, your going to confession under these circumstances once a week, with repentance and sorrow so often renewed, will be to you a great help and safeguard against sin; whereas, if you were to keep away from this Sacrament for any length of time, your sense of sorrow and compunction might become less keen, your self-examination less exact, and your watchfulness over your conduct less earnest, with the sad consequence that you would come to fall more readily into neglect of duty and into deliberate sin. Besides these reasons in favour of weekly confession when we have not fallen into fresh deliberate sin, another reason is founded upon the habit of holy persons. Other religious of your own and of every religious institute, and many Saints and devout persons, have practised weekly confession; their example invites you to do the same.

Please note that in adducing these arguments I am supposing that the reason, which the religious has alleged for not going every week to confession, is quite true: 'I have nothing to confess.' But possibly there is some inaccuracy or some mistake in this statement. Let me ask: Who is it that makes it? Is it a religious who is remarkable for

her exact observance? or who bears the repute of great holiness? or who is a religious of irreproachable life? Very likely it is not; for all such religious are truly humble. They entertain a lowly opinion of themselves; they detect failings in themselves which others do not observe, and they respect the observances of the religious life, and gladly avail themselves of weekly confession as a valuable means of procuring purity of soul. I think, then, we may conclude that it would be rather surprising if any such religious were to say: 'I don't see why I should go to confession once a week, for I have nothing to confess.' We are therefore left to infer that such a remark as this is made by a religious of a somewhat different stamp—indeed, by a religious who, if she only made an earnest and proper preparation, might derive special benefit from weekly confession. Let us hope that such a view of the case may strike her, and that, to secure the special benefit, she may come to adopt the wise course followed by so many not-less-good religious, and go to confession once a week.

Before dismissing this case, let me surmise that if this religious were to meditate upon the words of St. John, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,' she might find that they have some slight application to her case. She may not be aware how far her views differ from those of the Fathers of the Church. St. Gregory the Great, speaking of men of virtue, chosen souls, recommends even daily confession to them, for, he maintains, they must have faults to confess (in 1 Reg., lib. 2, cap. 1, vers.

5). He proceeds to invite all who approach Holy Communion daily to prove themselves by daily confession, because, he says, we offend daily. St. Augustine (*sup.* Psa. xcix.) urges us to frequent confession; his words are that we should confess always, because we always have matter for confession. 'It is difficult,' he says, 'in this life for a man to be so far purified as not to find in himself anything to confess.' The religious, then, whose case I have been supposing would do well to give the matter serious consideration, and to employ a humble and careful scrutiny of her thoughts, words, deeds and omissions, to assure herself that she has not been led into error as to the condition of her conscience.

As a rule, religious go to confession once a week. Strive to derive the full benefit which should result from this weekly reception of the holy Sacrament of Penance. Let me now put before you what has to be done, if you would receive it profitably.

Your examination of conscience should not be a scrupulous one, yet it should be a careful and effective one; it should lay bare whatever has been actually sinful. It should be your endeavour, without deceiving yourselves, to discover every sin which you have committed, and to repent sincerely of every one. You must not be disconcerted, in disposing yourselves for confession, by the thought which may come to your minds that you may offend in the same way again. It is quite probable that, owing to your frailty, you may fall again; for God

has not given you assurance that you shall be preserved from every fall. Although His grace is sufficient to preserve you from all sin, there may yet be a weakness in your co-operation with His grace. But such a probability should not be a bar to your repentance, or to your firm purpose of amendment; and therefore you should confess all those faults which you habitually commit. Your humble confession of them will obtain their forgiveness, and will also help you in your struggle against such faults.

In how many ways you are liable to fall, human frailty being so great! It may be useful to suggest some points for your examination.

Do you perhaps sin against humility by deliberate self-esteem, by referring to yourselves, and not to God, the success of any of your labours; by speaking with pride and pleasure of what you have done, in order to draw praise; by a haughty or disdainful conduct towards others, by performing your actions or fulfilling your duties with vanity and self-complacency? Do you perhaps sin against charity, by unkind remarks made to your sisters, by criticisms which give pain, by trying to wound or humble your neighbour, by bearing dislike or malice, by revealing or repeating the faults of another, by making a sister's failings the subject of conversation, by rash and unjust judgments formed of another's character and conduct, by marked want of consideration for others, or by personal disrespect? Do you perhaps sin against meekness, by unreasonable asperity, by fits of anger? Do you sin

against obedience by any act or conduct contrary to the known wish or direction of your superiors, by stubbornness in following your own way when your superiors have disapproved of it, or by secret disobedience? Do you sin against holy poverty by lending or giving anything without the proper permission, by receiving various presents without the superior's knowledge or leave? Do you sin in any way by omission, by sloth, by disedification, by giving bad advice, or by disregard of rule? Are you ever guilty of carelessness or disrespect in performing your religious exercises, or in receiving the holy Sacraments?

I offer these as points for examination when you are preparing for confession. Be on your guard against every such snare as a sense of self-importance, self-estimation, or self-righteousness. 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.' Recognise, rather, your sinfulness, and try, with all possible care and humility, to gauge the true measure of it. I invite you here to pause, to ask yourselves if you ever do try to convince yourselves of your wickedness as it is. Are there not phases in your sins which you do not realize?

You are sufficiently conscious of sin to admit that you have sinned; but, alas, how often your view of your sins, though they be only venial, is very superficial! You know that you do not see them as God sees them. But, at least, you must be willing to admit your limited knowledge and inadequate appreciation of your true sinfulness; and your faith must teach you that, whatever it is, it stands com-

pletely revealed and fully known to God, and that you are indebted to Him beyond all comprehension, first, for the merciful forbearance, and, secondly, for the tender mercy, which He has ever displayed towards you. In the case of your deliberate sins —say, of irreverence, of impatience, of disobedience, and of uncharitableness—God sees, in all their reality, the height of the ingratitude, the depth of the baseness, the breadth of the unworthiness of action, the intensity of the evil, the greatness of the wound to the soul, the fulness of the malice, the true measure of the weakness displayed, the lowness of the spiritual degradation, and the extent of the punishment deserved. Are you ever struck by any of these phases of your deliberate sins? Even under the more piercing eye of an interior person, such sins would appear a lamentable evil, worthy to be bewailed with many groans of remorse and tears of sorrow and repentance; but what are they under the all-seeing eye of God? Oh, how great is the evil of them in the eyes of a God of infinite sanctity! Should you not shudder for yourselves, because of your ignorance and thoughtlessness? Has not our Lord need to supplicate His heavenly Father for you, as for the Jews who crucified Him? 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

To continue. You know that a mere knowledge of your faults, and the historic recital of them, is not all that is requisite. It is essentially required that you have sorrow for the sins which are the 'remote matter' of the Sacrament of Penance, and

that your confession of them—which is the 'proximate matter' of the Sacrament — be a penitent acknowledgment of them. You must therefore be careful to excite yourselves to contrition. To do this you may give more or less time to such considerations as the holiness, goodness, and love of God; the sacred sufferings of our Blessed Lord, and the tenderness of His Sacred Heart; the punishment which the infinite justice of God must measure out to every sin; the great mercy which has already been shown to you. To bring yourselves to a proper disposition of sorrow, you may also call to mind your special obligations to God as religious, and your special indebtedness in view of the abundance of the graces conferred upon you; for the greater your indebtedness, the greater your ingratitude and the unseemliness of your sin.

In further preparation, besides some fervent form of contrition, you might employ some suitable verses of the Psalms, such as, 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy; and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin' (Psa. l.) Do not omit to cast yourselves at the feet of your blessed Immaculate Mother, the Mother of Mercy, the Refuge of Sinners, to beg of her to obtain for you the grace to make a good and profitable confession. Address yourselves fervently to the Sacred Heart of our Lord, to draw from that fountain of all grace the graces which you need, and the fulness of the Divine forgiveness.

I exhort you once more to be very careful about this part of your preparation. When it is finished, then with all hope and confidence approach the sacred tribunal, taking care to preserve your fervour and recollectedness.

Lo! you are about to receive a fresh proof of God's mercy; the merits of Christ's sacred Passion are about once more to be applied to your souls; God is about to co-operate with the priestly minister of the Sacrament; the Sacred Heart is to be consoled, and our Blessed Lady and the Angels and Saints are to rejoice; your souls are to be cleansed, and they are to receive a new lustre of sanctifying grace; your feet are to be strengthened, and new energy is to be given to your steps, that you may walk more perfectly in the way. O sacred channel of grace and source of so much good!

Make your confession humbly and with sufficient exactitude; do not gloss over your weakness; do not conceal the true state of your guilt; avoid mentioning what is not a sin; do not exaggerate your guilt. Remember that you do not kneel before the minister of the Sacrament to manifest how good you are, or to condone any malice which there may have been in your guilt, but you kneel as penitents to make known wherein and to what extent you have fallen, that God may pardon all the faults which you acknowledge to have committed. Anything which you knowingly and advisedly conceal as to the kind, degree, or number of your sins—if it be not necessarily implied in what you confess—does not fall directly under the absolution which is to be

judicially pronounced by the confessor. I need not remind you that to wilfully conceal a mortal sin in confession would be to profane the Sacrament and to add to your guilt; to conceal a venial sin would not have this sacrilegious result.

When you have made the confession of your faults, it behoves you to receive in a spirit of gratitude the penance which is imposed. Then once more give yourselves to sentiments of true sorrow, while the priest, the vicegerent of Christ, pronounces the form of absolution, receiving in a spirit of faith the assurance of your pardon, as from the lips of our Divine Lord Himself. You will then retire, to return thanks to God for the graces which you have received; to give expression in your fervent prayers to fresh loyalty and to a renewed determination to be more circumspect and more faithful; and, finally, you will perform the sacramental penance which has been imposed by the confessor. Let me exhort you, as a conclusion to your devotions after confession, to place yourselves once more under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin, also to add some psalm or canticle of thanksgiving, such as the Magnificat or the Divine Praises.

Let me add a further word of recommendation. It is this: If you have had the misfortune to fall into any sin of particular gravity, or into such as has given scandal to others, then it would be well, in addition to the sacramental penance, to resolve upon some special voluntary satisfaction, which you will perform by way of atonement. Let this voluntary satisfaction be some act of self-denial or some

extra devotional exercise. Have the days of such atonements gone by? Has the spirit of penance deteriorated? If so, so much the worse for those in whose breast it languishes. Men wish God to be generous in forgiving, while they strive to accomplish their reconciliation at the lowest possible cost to themselves. Is it surprising that so many fall again?

I put these thoughts about confession before you in order to remind you of what is required of you, if you would make your weekly confession with fervour and profit. What happy results in purity of conscience should result from it! Just as vessels of gold and silver are kept clean and bright by constant rubbing and polishing, so, we may say, is the soul preserved in purity and holiness by frequent confession. What a valuable preparation, too, your weekly confession is for assisting devoutly every day at the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass, and for receiving Holy Communion on the prescribed days! What a help it is to you to keep you fervent and dutiful religious! And, finally, what a magnificent preparation it is in order to secure for you the inestimable grace of a happy death: it is like a weekly preparation for death. If you endeavour to make every confession as though it were your last, then indeed you should, after every confession, be in dispositions to yield up your souls to God.

How pure the soul must be which is to enjoy in this life the sanctifying communications of the Holy Spirit—the soul to which our Lord will espouse Himself in an especial manner, and draw after Him

by the odour of the ointments of His love and His virtues; the soul which aspires to be united to God in eternity, and to follow the Lamb singing the new canticle! Oh, abase yourselves as the Saints have done, and deem yourselves far removed from that sanctity which your Divine Spouse demands of you! Go to Him, as to the Good Shepherd, with your wounds, that He may heal them; go often, go willingly. Let your faith discern what your senses are unable to detect. Behind the screen of what falls under observation in the holy Sacrament of Penance, there, all unseen, is that loving Shepherd; there He opens His sacred wounds to bathe your soul in the Precious Blood. The grace conveyed to your soul by that Sacrament is more than all the Angels and Saints could merit for you, or bestow. It is the hand of God that touches you and heals you. O Divine efficacy of the touch of Jesus! Your confession is over; arise! Your sins have been forgiven; your soul has been purified; you are made dearer to God.

Be resolved, then, to approach the holy Sacrament of Penance with all possible care. God, who designs it as a channel of special grace and a valuable means of your sanctification, will second your efforts. He will reward your fidelity by imparting to you a greater purity of soul, a keener discernment of what is pleasing to Him, and a greater desire of accomplishing it; He will bestow more efficacious help in the temptations and difficulties to which you are exposed, and a more perfect spirit of religious piety.

All this will win for you a sense of confidence like to that expressed by the penitent David, when he sang: 'Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life . . . that I may dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days' (Psa. xxii. 6).

XIII.

INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR LIFE.

'I live, now not I ; but Christ liveth in me.'—GAL. ii. 20.

THERE is in you a twofold life—a life which attaches you to this world, and a life which is especially related to the world to come. The one is that life by which you breathe and grow, and use the frame and powers belonging to a human being; the other is that life by which you know, love, and serve God, and you term it your supernatural life. The first may be said to increase, to lessen, and to become extinct ; while the second should ever flourish and increase. The first you lose by death, but the second you should never lose. The true servant of God is willing to sacrifice the first, rather than imperil the second by mortal sin. How highly, then, you should value the supernatural life, and protect and foster it ! The relation of this supernatural life to the world to come is so intimate and so necessary that it will secure your everlasting happiness in that world, and, under God's unfettered goodness, it will regulate the degree of glory which you will receive in the kingdom of heaven. The supernatural life may be termed the life of man's sanctification. It wears as

many complexions, or exists in as many degrees, as there are vocations, and even as there are souls, for all have not received the same degree of grace; 'but to everyone,' St. Paul says, 'is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ' (Eph. iv. 7). In another place St. Paul tells us that we are 'the house' of Christ, 'if we hold fast the confidence and glory of hope unto the end' (Heb. iii. 6). We are, then, the house of Christ, not inasmuch as we live, breathe, and move, but inasmuch as we are united to Christ by supernatural grace and virtue. Thus, we find St. Paul, after he had declared that he was nailed to the cross with Christ, breaking forth, as in an ecstasy of spiritual union, into that expression of its intensity: 'I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.' Do you not all wish that, corresponding fully with grace, that is, with God's designs in your regard, you might express yourselves as fervently and as truly as did St. Paul, in the same sense?

Now, just as the house has to be built with both exterior and interior adornment, and with due regard to both, according to the position and requirements of its owner, so should it be with the spiritual edifice in man.

If this be so, how beautifully adorned yours should be! St. Peter, addressing all the faithful without distinction, says: 'Be ye also as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ' (1 St. Pet. ii. 5). Your life should correspond with the holiness and with the duties of your vocation.

In its exterior, in its interior, it should be all that becomes a devout religious; it should be this, not in the exterior only, not in the interior only, but in both. This is a view which I ask you to impress well upon your minds during this retreat.

Because the exterior life, as far as depends upon yourselves, receives its mould from the interior, of which it is a certain manifestation, I invite your consideration, first of all, to what your interior life should be.

In the first place you should be actuated by a lively faith.

How important faith is to you, not only as being necessary for your salvation, but also as your guide and moving power in all you do! You should be impregnated by it. You need it for yourselves; you need it that you may help others. It is by faith that you learn and come to realize and appreciate your relations with Almighty God, and the marvellous results of the Incarnation and Redemption, and the triumph of grace over sin. St. Paul says: 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus' (1 Cor. iv. 6).

It is by faith that you appreciate the true value of many actions which others regard as useless and unprofitable; by faith, too, that you realize the benefit of sufferings and trials, of humility and patience. It is faith which teaches you the necessity and value of piety, and the merit of the holy state of religion. Finally, it is faith which unfolds to your delighted

vision, though you see it but dimly now, the everlasting glory destined for you in the world to come. You cannot do without faith, for it is the very groundwork of all religion—the gateway to the supernatural. If all the faithful should possess it and build up their spiritual life upon it, it should in you glow with special brightness and force. Since 'every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights' (St. James i. 17), ask God to strengthen and increase your faith, that it may not be unreal or fanciful, but strong, clear, active, penetrating, and sustaining.

An important element in the spiritual life, and an indispensable adornment of the soul, is humility. There are two kinds of knowledge which you must cultivate in order to acquire the perfection of this virtue; the first is the knowledge of God, and the second is the knowledge of yourselves. Of these two kinds of knowledge is begotten humility, the foundation of the moral virtues. Study to know yourselves; remove all delusions and all obstacles to this salutary knowledge. The true knowledge of yourselves will not reveal to you any greatness, nobility of character, or other excellence; but it will convince you of your sinfulness, your misery, your unworthiness, your nothingness, your infidelities, your weakness, your baseness, and your ingratitude. How many among you are in possession of this knowledge, and are really persuaded of the truth of this picture of yourselves? How few value such knowledge as this! Perhaps fewer again are impressed by it. A religious should be humble; she is the 'handmaid of the

Lord'; humility should reign in her heart; then would it be a noble heart, one dear to God; it would be as a precious metal ready to be moulded into the richest vessel; it would be as a field of good ground ready to yield a golden harvest. 'He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid . . . and hath exalted the humble' (St. Luke i. 48, 52). Solomon says: 'Glory shall uphold the humble of spirit' (Prov. xxix. 23). This is the strong and solid foundation upon which shall be built a stately mansion; it is as the rock upon which the wise man built his house. All spiritual writers, following the teaching of our Lord and the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, insist upon the necessity of humility. Do you take a different view of its necessity? I am sure you do not. Look upon it as necessary as well for the success of your works as for your own sanctification, and for your advancement in virtue; for God bestows His grace upon the humble and blesses their works. It has always been the humble, and not the proud, whom He has used in the accomplishment of His great purposes. In order to acquire this grand and precious virtue, study to know yourselves. What, indeed, are we? The Holy Ghost has declared: 'All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field' (Isa. xl. 6). If you study to know yourselves, what will you discover? As all your grace and all true excellence are from God, you will discover that of yourselves you are nothing. When you have reached this knowledge and become convinced of its truth, then will you begin to be humble. Of this salutary knowledge the 'Spiritual Combat'

says: 'O heavenly knowledge, which makes us happy here, and glorious hereafter! O admirable light, piercing through the darkness of this nothing, in order to enlighten our souls and raise our minds to God! O precious but unknown jewel, which shineth through the filth of our sins! O nothing, the contemplation of which puts all things in our power!'

Just as faith is the basis of supernatural life, so is humility the basis of supernatural virtue. If, therefore, you would be spiritual, you must love it, and seek to be humble. Away, then, with arrogance, self-conceit, vainglory, self-complacency, and all the tribe of miserable and empty delusions about your own excellence! Your spirit of humility will not, however, be left unrewarded; for our Lord said to Blessed Margaret Mary, 'The more you retire into your own nothingness, the more does My greatness lower itself to find you.'

If you have faith and sincere and profound humility, the interior life has its two stanchest qualities; great things may be expected of you; you will run in the course of your sanctification; the Holy Ghost will enrich you with His gifts. But the interior of Christ's house, which is your soul, needs further adornment. You must, in addition, seek to embellish your souls with piety and charity. The one will be your agreeable homage to God, while the other will lead you to do your duty to your neighbour.

St. Paul says, 'Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and

spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord' (Eph. v. 18, 19). This is a description of Christian piety; it embraces more than reverence, respect, and dutiful submission. For Christian piety, over and above this, is a spirit of love and devotedness; it is the secret spring of the lives of zeal and self-abnegation and of the deeds of heroism which have made Christianity the theme of praise in every age and in every land. Where would be the splendour of worship in the Catholic Church, the glorious calendar of Saints, the admirable array of religious orders and institutes, the holy works and institutions for the relief and consolation of humanity and for the amelioration of society, if it were not for pious pontiffs, pious bishops and priests, pious founders, pious men and women? These things would not be if it had not been for the spirit of piety thriving in the Church. What, then, shall we say if in these days religious, fallen away from the spirit of their institute and from their own first fervour, are to be found with hearts as cold as the shores of Lapland, and as sterile as the fig-tree which fell under the curse of our Saviour? Our Lord said, 'The true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeketh such to adore Him' (St. John iv. 23); He demands fervent adorers, worshippers whose homage comes from pious hearts. Foremost among these worshippers should be found religious. Have you not experienced exceeding goodness on God's part? Would it not, then, be a shame if you were wanting in that fervent piety

which would place you in that enviable position? I exhort you all to press forward, to draw nearer every day to your Divine Spouse by a tender but solid piety. Pray to the Holy Ghost for this most excellent gift, that your service of God may be, as the fragrant sacrifice, acceptable in His sight.

Your interior adornment will not be complete without the golden ornament of charity, or love of your neighbour. You have the happiness of belonging to the Christian family; you have the privileged vocation to be members of a religious institute. There must be a golden and glorious bond uniting you all in holy fellowship, and the strength of this bond must proceed from your interior dispositions and feelings. Outward show of charity will have but little effect and short endurance if it does not result from a deep-seated charity in your hearts. You must love your neighbour as yourselves for God's sake: this charity and your love of God must have their place side by side in your hearts. In fact, the love of our neighbour is only a phase of the love of God. Our charity towards our neighbour is not entertained only with a view to our gain or advantage, but it is a noble and sublime affection, rising above self-interest, and resulting from our love of God. It is God's will that we bear this charity towards our neighbour; and St. John says, 'He that loveth not, abideth in death' (1 St. John iii. 14). You will obtain this interior disposition of charity by prayer; it is a great grace. You must foster it; it may be only a little spark at first, but it may be blown into a great flame. How pleasing

this virtue will make you to our Lord! If, alas! there are dissensions, jealousies, coldnesses, dislikes, estrangements, and misunderstandings, in your relations with your neighbour, the explanation will be found in the fact that interior charity is wanting. 'Above all these things,' wrote St. Paul, 'have charity, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also you are called in one body' (Col. iii. 14, 15). St. Paul describes in another place all the qualities and manifestations of this exquisite virtue (1 Cor. xiii.); and elsewhere he says, 'He that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law' (Rom. xiii. 8). Our Lord, by His last will and testament, bequeathed charity to His followers as the token of Christianity; and does not the rule of your holy institute inspire its exercise? Strive, then, as you wish to be devout followers of our Lord, and true children of the religious family which has adopted you, to embellish your inmost soul with this golden and shining ornament of charity.

We have considered only four main features of the interior life—faith, humility, piety, and charity; they portray, as it were, the height and depth and width which should be attained. Many other dimensions might also be taken to complete the drawing, but they would bear in some way upon what we have thus far sketched. Look, then, upon these interior dispositions, not only and not simply as desirable, but also as necessary to you, for they are so; and seek to develop them more and more in your souls: for by so much the more will you advance

in perfection, and become more pleasing to God, and fulfil more perfectly the holy vocation which you have received.

In Psa. xliv. 15 it is said: 'All the glory of the King's daughter is within in golden borders;' and then is added: 'clothed round about with varieties.' Perfection does not consist in only the interior—that is, in the virtue and excellence of your hearts and dispositions; there must also be a counterpart in your exterior conduct—that is, in an edifying life and good works. Thus, our Lord says: 'So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven' (St. Matt. v. 16). When St. Paul said, 'I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me,' he spoke of his union with Christ in his heart and spirit; but there was also the manifestation of the grace of that union in his life and works. If his exterior conduct had not an intimate correspondence with his interior grace, there would have been a sad contradiction, which would have deprived his words of their intended meaning. Let no religious, when her exterior conduct is faulty, excuse herself under the plea that she gives more attention to the interior life; ah, that would look like hypocrisy. The exterior, if genuine, manifests the interior.

It behoves you, therefore, to examine what your outward conduct is in your community life, in discharging the offices and duties connected with the works of your institute, and, finally, in your social relations. It should, in its entire and constant bearing, be religious and edifying. For my own

part, I believe that it is so; yet I venture to suggest matter for your examination.

A rule of life to be followed by every member of your institute is to be found in your holy rules. In the interior of your convents you are required to edify one another by following this wise rule of life; this compliance with the rule is termed 'religious observance.' Time and place are regulated for prayer and meditation, for hearing Holy Mass, for Holy Communion and thanksgiving, for rosary and other devotions, and for spiritual reading. Regulations exist about your going out and your coming in, about the privacy of your cells, about your meals and recreations, and about silence. There should be a sacredness about your respect for religious observance; it has ecclesiastical sanction, it is the yoke which sanctifies your daily life, it is the mould which gives the shape to your exterior life, while it at the same time helps to mould your character, and give you a religious tone and spirit. Religious founders and ascetical writers have rightly insisted upon this observance; it may be said to be, in a sense, to religious life what clothing is to the body. The body must not only be fed, it must also be clothed, so that it may retain the heat generated by food. Then, the style and quality of the attire indicate the wearer's station in life. The interior grace of religion must be protected and abetted by religious observance; then, the particular acts and requirements of this observance indicate the institute to which the religious belongs. It is not for you to alter or modify the rule of life laid down for you in

your Constitutions, or to say that other institutes have fewer or more religious exercises or observances; but, loyal to your own institute and true to your vocation, you should strive to be exact in all that observance which is demanded of you.

But do you perhaps fail, without sufficient excuse, to rise with the community? Do you shorten your meditations, and even sometimes omit them? Do you absent yourselves from other community devotions? Do you give yourselves the habit of breaking silence? Do you ever enter the cells of other religious to air your grievances or hold unnecessary conversation? Do you observe what your rule lays down about seeking various permissions from your superior, and about obtaining her approval of what you undertake? Do you cause any of your sisters to break the rules and regulations of your convent? Alas, how much valuable time is wasted, and how much disedification is given in some convents by religious who have fallen from their first fervour! For the love you have of your vocation and the respect you have for the holy state of religion, strive to correct whatever your shortcomings may be in religious observance; endeavour by your fidelity in keeping the rule to bring down God's blessing, not only upon yourselves individually, but also upon your community and upon your holy institute.

What is your exterior conduct in carrying on the various works of your institute? It should be edifying, exact, and even zealous or devoted. How useful are the various works which the many institutes in the Church carry on! They devote

themselves chiefly to the spiritual and corporal works of mercy; they have the blessing of God and His Church; they not only become benefactors to society, but they also assist those under their care in the work of their salvation. But how much depends upon the devotedness and edification of the individual members of these institutes! Weigh, then, the importance of the works in which you are engaged, and let every one fulfil carefully and conscientiously the duties marked out for her. There should be a charity in your bearing and a kindliness in your speech, which should inspire confidence and affection, and just as much reserve in your manner as will command respect. I need not point out what would be faulty; your religious sense tells you to avoid foolish levity, ostentation, inconsiderateness, show of temper, excessive talking, briskness and severity. Let not the cause of religion suffer in any way by such faultiness of manner, nor yet by neglect or carelessness. The sacred cause of religion and of charity is the cause of grace and of God. Be devoted to it, promote it by every means of which you are capable within the scope of your vocation. 'In doing good,' says St. Paul, 'let us not fail; for in due time we shall reap, not failing. Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith' (Gal. vi. 9, 10).

It remains for you, lastly, to examine your exterior conduct in your relations with seculars. You must be religious at all times and in all places. Religion is not to be put on and taken off like a

garment; you are wedded to it. You have relations with seculars who come to see you; your works bring them about you; sometimes you have to go and see them. Happily, religious respect themselves, and they are respected by others. Still, you must be on your guard not to cause remark, by showing any relish for gossip or conversation of a worldly character; you must be careful to keep your own counsel about the affairs of your community; you must not allow yourselves to become entangled in matters which do not concern you; you must check levity, lest it become dissipation; you must turn a deaf ear to all scandals, to stories which are being spread, and to praise offered to yourselves. If you should, through any weakness, act otherwise, not only will the fault weigh upon you, but, be sure of it, the person who has led you into it will remark your weakness, and will be disedified. Religious cannot be too circumspect.

And now we will draw our considerations to close. You must be convinced that unless you give due attention to both your interior life—that life of yours which is hidden in the soul—and to your exterior life—that life of yours which falls under your neighbour's observation—you will fail to reach that perfection which is demanded of you. You must also be convinced that, if your exterior conduct is to be edifying and in keeping with the requirements of your calling, the interior life must be formed to the right spirit. Cultivate the spirit; strive by the aid of God's grace to adorn the interior of the house with a lively faith, with humility, and

with piety and charity. Herein is real and solid virtue. And as all things come by prayer, ask our Lord to build up the spiritual edifice, the edifice of your sanctification; ask Him to aid you by His grace to give the house its full interior adornment and its becoming exterior adornment, that you too may be able to say with St. Paul: 'I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.' Beseech the Divine Spouse of your souls to make you more devout in His service, more *z*ealous for His glory, and more earnest about your religious perfection. For 'unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it' (Psa. cxxvi. 1).

FIFTH DAY.

XIV.

TEACHINGS OF THE PASSION.

'Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps.'—1 ST. PET. ii. 21.

OUR Divine Lord invites you to walk in His footsteps, to imitate His virtues. He deigns to address you tenderly, if not pleadingly, saying, 'Learn of Me.' Perhaps, even, His words are meant as a command. You study the lessons of His sacred life, His teachings in Bethlehem, in Egypt, in Nazareth, in his missionary career; what a fund of instruction they supply you with! Can you tire of the study of these lessons? Oh, well will it be if you learn them and appreciate them. But come now to Gethsemani, to the Pretorium, to Calvary; come to the outpouring of the Precious Blood; to the wounding, the bruising, the sacrificing of the Lamb of God; come to see the Man of Sorrows. Say with the spouse in the Canticles: 'I will go to the mountain of myrrh' (iv. 6). Has Christ any follower who does not love the Sacred Passion, and who is not moved by the

picture of so much suffering? It is not pretended that our Lord's love for man varied at different times during His life, that it was stronger or greater in Gethsemani than in Nazareth; but it would appear in our eyes especially accentuated during the sufferings and ignominy endured so generously and so patiently in His Sacred Passion. 'Christ hath loved us,' St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 'and hath delivered Himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness' (v. 2). We have evidence, as well of God's will that the events of the Passion should have a special place in our memory and in our devotion, as of the piety of the Apostles towards this deep mystery of suffering, in the lengthened and detailed narration in which the history of the Sacred Passion has been handed down to us in the holy Gospels. Should not this convince us that we are expected to find in it many lessons for our instruction? and should not the harrowing scenes in which these lessons are portrayed impress them vividly and deeply upon our minds and hearts?

When God appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, Moses exclaimed: 'I will go and see this great sight' (Exod. iii. 3); and he drew near to do so. This same God it is who, in the sacred humanity of the Second Adorable Person, displays Himself before us in the fire of the tribulation of the Passion, therefore in a manner even more wonderful than His appearance in the burning bush. He is gashed, and bruised, and defiled with spittle; He is covered with the blood

of His own countless wounds; a crown of thorns pierces His sacred brow; nails are run through His hands and feet; He hangs upon a cross. 'We have seen Him,' exclaimed the prophet, 'and there was no sightliness . . . despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows' (Isa. liii. 2, 3). Yet this is He in whom 'dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally' (Col. ii. 9). Come, then, and see this great sight. But why do I ask you to study it during your retreat? Let me tell you. It is because you ought to examine what your dispositions and conduct are with regard to conformity with the Divine will, with regard to patience, and with regard to the love of the Cross. Your perfection does not consist only in action, but also in supporting trials, sufferings, and contradictions. 'Yet so,' St. Paul says, 'if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him' (Rom. viii. 17). Religious are to be found who are willing to spend themselves in external work, but who prove themselves very weak when their plans are upset, when they meet with opposition, when they are kept from their usual occupations by sickness or by the wish of their superiors. They eagerly follow our Lord in His missionary journeys, but have little love for the path of the Passion.

I invite you, first of all, to learn from the sacred Passion conformity with the Divine will. When our Lord foretold to His Apostles the many things which He was about to suffer, St. Peter would not hear of it; he could not witness his Lord reduced to such straits, or even believe it possible that such

trials should overtake Him, and he exclaimed: 'Lord, be it far from Thee: this shall not come unto Thee.' Our Lord, whose meat it was to do the will of His Heavenly Father (St. John iv. 34), gave St. Peter to understand how wrong it would be to oppose God's designs, addressing to him this reprimand: 'Go behind Me, Satan, thou art a scandal unto Me: because thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men' (St. Matt. xvi. 23). It was in the decrees of God that our Lord should suffer. Our Lord therefore entered fully into God's designs with a perfect conformity of will. What befalls you is in accordance with the Divine decrees; you, too, in imitation of our Lord, must strive always to conform your will to the Divine will. But go to Gethsemani to witness our Lord's actual conformity with His Heavenly Father's decrees concerning His sufferings. The chalice of His Passion is prepared, the time is now at hand to drink it: what does our Blessed Saviour do? He communes with His Divine Father in prayer. With what object? To emphasize His conformity; to beg that, if that bitter chalice must be drunk, His Father will not withdraw it, but leave it with Him that He may drink it to the dregs. In what light has the Passion before Him appeared, and what effect has the picture produced upon Him, before He utters His prayer of submission and perfect conformity? He beheld the Passion in all the cruel details of its various scenes and countless sufferings; since moments of pain seem like so many hours, what a prolonged agony

must have appeared those many hours which were to pass before His death! He counted all His bleeding wounds, and He fathomed the depths of His anguish; He beheld all the sins of the world for which He was to atone, and He measured out the full atonement which was exacted of Him; He realized all the meaning of the appalling prophecies which foretold His sufferings and ignominy; He marked the profuse shedding of the Precious Blood and the painful ebbing away of life. All this and much more was in His mind, and He permitted it to produce in Him the most poignant effect. 'He began to fear and to be heavy;' He said to Peter, James, and John: 'My soul is sorrowful even unto death'; He fell flat on the ground, and prayed, saying: 'My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' And His sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground; and being in agony, He prayed the longer; a second and a third time He repeated the same prayer: 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.' He uttered this noble and generous prayer of resignation with a full knowledge of the sufferings before Him, and fully disposed to endure them all, if only His heavenly Father so willed it. Oh, admire this picture of perfect conformity with the will of God under the most unprecedented circumstances, and study well the lesson it teaches.

You are not without your trials; but in presence of the Sacred Passion—of those terrible sufferings endured by our Blessed Saviour for your sake—they

are dwarfed into insignificance. Yet, withal, to you, and perhaps even in themselves, they are severe. But in what spirit do you bear them? Do you conform yourselves under them with the Divine will fully and generously? Does the thought and desire of doing so present itself to you and sway you? Ask yourselves if you have any will but the Divine will in all that befalls you in life, in the arrangements of your superiors, in the circumstances of your employments, in the derangement of your time and convenience, in the incongenial character of your surroundings, in the variations of the temperature and of the seasons, in the vicissitudes of life in your family and among your friends in the world, in the daily occurrences around you? Your dispositions in your worship of God will be faulty if you do not seek at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, to bring your will into conformity with the Divine will; and, be assured, the path of conformity with the Divine will is not only the path of perfection, but it is also the path of true peace. Look often upon your Divine Model: 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps.' Follow Him as faithfully as you can in desiring only to do and to suffer all that God appoints and permits.

You have contemplated our Lord at Gethsemani, come now to the Pretorium, and, with all reverence, look upon Him in His sufferings there, and learn of Him how to be patient. He has been roughly seized upon, treated worse than any robber, and brought

before Annas and Caiphas. Savage men have spit in His adorable face, and buffeted Him, and struck His face with the palms of their hands; they have derided Him and bid Him prophesy; they have spent their malice and their cruelty upon Him during a long night. And now it is morning; He is tightly bound; He stands, surrounded by enemies and false accusers, before Pilate. How truly He is called the innocent Lamb of God! Accusations are heaped up against Him; He is calumniated. How does He bear this trial? How does He defend Himself? How does He repel and disprove the calumnious assertions of His bitter, unscrupulous, and relentless enemies? He is silent. The prophecy of Isaias is fulfilled: 'He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before His shearers, and He shall not open His mouth' (Isa. liii. 7). He is rejected for Barabbas, a notorious criminal. Does He protest? Does He aver His proved and acknowledged innocence? Does He remind the Jewish people of the wonders which, in their behalf, He has wrought among them? Does He upbraid them with their base ingratitude? No; He maintains a composure and a silence which astonish Pilate and all around him.

And now begin the most cruel of the sufferings of the Passion. Pilate gives our Lord over to the soldiers to be scourged. How little we know of that prolonged scourging! The sacred flesh is cut, gashed, lacerated, and beaten, finally, into one extensive wound; the precious and adorable blood is sprinkled on every side. All human feeling seems to have deserted the

soldiers; perhaps they ceased the scourging only when they feared our Lord was about to die. We look on in spirit; our feelings are those of inexpressible pity and horror; but we hear no cry—no, not even a moan. Jesus is silent—silent. O miraculous patience!

Surely we are now at the end of this stage of the Sacred Passion. But no; fresh insults are now heaped upon our meek and exhausted Saviour; His head is crowned with sharp thorns; a purple robe is put on Him; He is mocked, and many attendants take their turn at deriding Him. 'Behold the Man!' Jesus, all-patient and unresisting, the cruel thorns piercing His head and tender brow, the blood trickling down His sacred countenance, is still silent. But what is this excited cry, which is taken up by all the multitude, and which now echoes through the Pretorium? A fiendish enthusiasm has seized upon the crowd, which seeks to overturn the scales of justice, and which succeeds in doing it. 'Crucify Him! crucify Him!' is heard on all sides. 'Why,' expostulates Pilate, 'what evil hath He done?' 'Let Him be crucified!' is the answer. 'What!' rejoins Pilate, 'shall I crucify your King?' 'Crucify Him! crucify Him!' is the unyielding and relentless reply.

In all these scenes our Lord maintains an unalterable patience. You have not only to work, you have also to suffer. This is the Model which you must place before yourselves, to preserve you from complaints, murmurs, repinings, and relutance. Of how many precious merits these faults have perhaps

already deprived you! You have to take up your cross daily. In what spirit do you accept and endure the various annoyances, disappointments, and bodily and mental sufferings, met with in the course of each day? Do you look upon it as a grievance to have these slight trials to bear? Ah, should you not burn with a more ardent desire of being conformable to your Lord, the Divine Spouse of your souls, in suffering? The holy writer says: 'Take all that shall be brought upon thee; and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience' (Ecclus. ii. 4). You must be as the gold and silver that are tried in the fire; but strive by patience to come well out of the trial, that you may be approved. You must not, under it, look to Nature for support or guidance: Nature will be fretful and restless; the mind will lose its composure; therefore must you withhold the intemperate word and check the hasty murmur. 'In your patience,' our Lord said, 'you shall possess your souls' (St. Luke xxi. 19). Strive to recollect yourselves, then, under the trial; pray; look to God for the grace you need. Holy David said: 'Be thou, O my soul, subject to God, for from Him is my patience' (Psa. lxi. 6). In the time of the trial, when you have recollected yourselves and prayed, turn in spirit to your King and Saviour in His Sacred Passion, and see how He is fixing His eyes upon you, to know if you are willing to be His companions in suffering. Brace up your spirit with resolution and devotedness, and ask Him to strengthen you and give you patience. This second lesson, then,

which you are to learn from the Sacred Passion is one of patience.

You may think that you have progressed far enough in the passive stages of perfection when you have reached the point at which you have learned that you should ever conform your will to the Divine will, and be patient under the trials of life; but there is yet another lesson proposed to generous souls, which you would do well to study. We will go to Calvary to learn it. It is the love of the Cross. Even though you should not follow the footsteps of the Saints to this further height of perfection in the imitation of Christ crucified, you may yet look up at it, and acknowledge in all humility that you have not reached the virtue of the Saints, and perhaps grace may yet touch your hearts to make you aspire to this love of the Cross. Go to Calvary to meditate upon the meaning of St. Peter's words: 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps.'

You reach Calvary when the Cross has been raised with the Divine victim nailed to it. From all eternity this death had been decreed, foreknown, elected, and accepted; therefore must we say that Jesus loved the Cross. He has not confined His thoughts only to His own sufferings and ignominy upon it, but His thoughts and affections have gone out to, and have embraced, the whole scope, bearings, and results of this mystery of Divine love. He saw the glory which His death upon the Cross would give to His Heavenly Father, and the benefits which, in innumerable and unspeakable ways, it would shower

upon all His creatures. You also may conceive a love of the Cross for these same reasons, and thus perform an act of religion pleasing to our Lord and meritorious in the sight of God; but I ask you to love the Cross especially for our Lord's sake. Look upon Him on the Cross as the lover of your souls, as the Lamb of God immolated as a victim for your salvation; as offering Himself to His Heavenly Father to expiate your sins, to save you from everlasting death and from hell, and to win for you a place in the heavenly kingdom for all eternity. Oh, see, then, what He has suffered on the Cross for your sakes; see that sacred body, wounded all over; see the nails piercing the hands and feet; see the bruises upon the face and limbs; see the thorny crown upon the head; see the precious blood trickling down from every part. Count every minute of the three hours' agony; note the thirst, the suffering, the exhaustion, the desolation. What a mysterious lengthening-out of the suffering! Yet He might have died within the first five minutes. Do you not see how Jesus loved the Cross, and how He loved you? Oh, what a wide field for meditation we find on Calvary! I leave it to your own reflections; it will teach you why the Saints loved the Cross. 'O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow' (Lam. i. 12). The sight has won many hearts, has wrought many conversions, and has made many Saints. What graces will it not bring to you? What good will it not operate in you? It will draw you closer to the Spouse of your souls; it will inspire you with

courage; it will take away the bitterness of your trials, if it does not also make you embrace them willingly for our Lord's sake. St. Bernard says: 'Will not everything be easy to you, when you shall have collected together for yourself all the bitter sufferings of your Lord?'* Should you not reckon it a part of a Christian's vocation to suffer? St. Paul wrote to the Philippians (i. 29): 'Unto you it is given for Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him.' This suffering, according to St. Augustine, should be lifelong. 'A Christian,' he says, 'should hang on the Cross through his whole life, for the time for drawing out the nails is not in this life' (Aug., Serm. 32, De Div.). I have said that we must look to the Saints to find examples of this love of the Cross. How vehement it was in St. Paul! When Agabus foretold to him while he was at Cesarea that he should be bound in Jerusalem, and the faithful weeping pressed him not to depart, St. Paul replied: 'I am ready, not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts xxi. 13). To the Galatians he wrote: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world' (Gal. vi. 14). To the Corinthians he wrote: 'I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation' (2 Cor. vii. 4). Many of the early Christians and the martyrs were filled with a like spirit, and Saints have existed in every age of the Church who pined

* 'Quid non tibi suave, cum tibi collegeris omnes amaritudines Domini tui?' (St. Ber., De Quadrup. Debit.).

after sufferings for the love of Christ crucified. St. Gertrude was never more grieved, it is said, than when she had nothing to suffer. St. Teresa's saying, 'To suffer or to die; if I may not suffer, then let me die,' is well known to you. Blessed Henry Suso was taught these three lessons by our Lord: Receive afflictions willingly; bear crosses patiently; learn to suffer like Jesus Christ. This is the height of perfection in this matter which we have now under consideration—namely, to love the Cross. Let me invite you, at least, to desire to have this love, which is a proof of a strong and tender devotion to our Lord in the mysteries of His sufferings; He has left you 'an example that you should follow His steps.'

And now, in conclusion, reproach yourselves with whatever faults you have committed in not conforming your will with the Divine will, in giving way to impatience, and in shirking little crosses. Compare your pains, anxieties, and troubles arising from bodily or mental sufferings, from unkind words, from intentional or unintentional annoyance, or from neglect or thoughtlessness, with the bitter, cruel sufferings, insults and ignominy heaped upon our Divine Saviour. Finally, make your good resolutions, in all sincerity, to embrace for the future with patient conformity, if not with joy, every trial which it may please God to send you, and to comply as far as you are able with the penitential works imposed upon you by the Church and by your holy rule. The way of patient suffering is the way of great sanctity, rich merit and magnificent reward. This

is the teaching of St. Peter, where he says: 'You shall greatly rejoice, if now you must be for a little time made sorrowful in divers temptations; that the trial of your faith (much more precious than gold which is tried by the fire) may be found unto praise and glory and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ' (1 St. Pet. i. 6, 7).

XV.

HOLY COMMUNION.

'Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, My dearly beloved.'—CANT. v. 1.

IF you have recognised, in the weekly reception of the Sacrament of Penance, a great help to your sanctification and fervour, what shall be said of the fruits to your souls which must result from the frequent devout reception of the Holy Eucharist? The heavenly banquet is prepared for you, when the Divine Victim is mystically, but truly, sacrificed upon the altar; and then, when you approach the sacred Table, you each in your turn receive that same Divine Victim for the good of your souls. Yes, in that reception you partake verily and indeed of the Body and Blood of Christ. Reflect often on our Lord's words; how clearly they teach the doctrine of the Real Presence! 'For My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, abideth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me' (St. John vi. 56-58). In receiving this holy Sacrament, you quit the desert

for the time being, and you enter into the garden of the heavenly Spouse; and it is rightly called Communion, for Christ, your Lord, enters into your heart.

We but faintly realize all the love of our Lord for us in coming into the world, if we pass by what He has done for man in instituting the Holy Eucharist. His love was not satisfied with only assuming our nature, nor yet with uniting Himself to our souls by His grace; no, He must also, while renewing and continuing the sacrifice of Himself to His Heavenly Father, renew and continue also the act of His Last Supper. Inviting, therefore, the faithful to sit at His Table, and saying, 'Take ye, and eat, for this is My Body,' He, through the divinely ordained ministry of His priests, gives Himself sacramentally to both priests and people, to be their food. Other sacred texts convey a similar invitation: 'Come, eat My bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you' (Prov. ix. 5); 'Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, My dearly beloved' (Cant. v. 1); 'Come to Me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you' (St. Matt. xi. 28). Our Lord's desire is to be Himself in this most wonderful manner our refection and our refreshment. How can we possibly conceive the astonishing grandeur of this Sacrament, and the full extent of the Divine condescension? Then, in Ecclesiasticus (xxiv. 29) it is written: 'They that eat Me shall yet hunger, and they that drink Me shall yet thirst.' Do you respond eagerly to the wishes of the heavenly Bridegroom, and do you experience this holy avidity?

It is important as well as consoling to remark that the invitation to this sacramental banquet is pressing; it may not be declined. Let all accept it; let no vain excuses be made. 'Take ye, and eat. . . . Drink ye all of this' (St. Matt. xxvi. 26, 27). Let all, therefore, press forward to find a seat at the banquet; let all come hungry and eager; but let all put on the wedding-garment. 'Let a man prove himself; and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice' (1 Cor. xi. 28).

In what terms can we adequately express our sense of the true magnificence of this Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord? The Council of Trent calls it the Bread of Angels, the Venerable and Divine Sacrament, a symbol of unity and charity, the spiritual food of souls, an antidote against sin, a pledge of future glory. Our Lord, in speaking to St. Gertrude, called it the most precious gage of His love. So sublime are these mysteries that the Holy Eucharist, as a Sacrifice and a Sacrament, has ever been the central object of worship and devotion in the Church; and it behoves all Christians to be pious, and to live up to the perfect standard of a Christian life, if only that they may fit themselves, as far as they are able, to do homage to our Lord in the adorable Sacrament of His Real Presence, and to enjoy the inestimable blessings which flow from it. The Blessed Sacrament is the richest and most precious treasure of the Church.

The words of one of the prophets are applied to this great Sacrament: 'What is the good thing of Him, and what is His beautiful thing, but the corn

of the elect, and wine springing forth virgins?' (*Zach.* ix. 17). 'I speak as to wise men,' said St. Paul; 'judge ye yourselves what I say. The chalice of benediction, which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the Body of the Lord?' (1 Cor. x. 15, 16). Many beautiful thoughts might be drawn from a comparison of the prefigurements with the reality; but, as we are considering the special subject of Holy Communion, and cannot therefore embrace too wide a field, let it suffice to refer to what our Lord said about one of the prefigurements. 'Your fathers,' He said to the Jews, 'did eat manna in the desert, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven: that if any man eat of it, he may not die.' These words tell us that this Divine Sacrament is the true bread of life, the food of immortality.

I invite you, then, to renew your faith in the greatness, dignity and value of this Sacrament, and in the absolute truth of our Lord's real presence therein. The veils are humble, the ceremonies are simple, the surroundings are poor, our senses cannot detect as much as was observable at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, or on Calvary; our Lord conceals both his Divinity and his sacred humanity, and his very life and being. Your lively faith must discern them, and with St. John you must exclaim: 'It is the Lord!' (St. John xxi. 7). It is the Lord; yes, you know, of very truth, that in every Communion it is the Divine Majesty which abases itself; the only-begotten Son of God coming, not only to visit you,

but also to unite Himself to you, and become your food. Must we not all stand in awe and wonderment when we realize this august mystery?

But although in every Holy Communion you partake of the flesh of the Lamb of God, and receive the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the Holy One of God, your Emmanuel, you must not withdraw and abstain from this sacred banquet through fear, nor yet, speaking generally, through a sense of reverence. Your sense of reverence will lead you to give proper care to make becoming preparation. God will receive more worship from your reception of the Sacrament than from your abstention, provided that you are in the dispositions necessary for a worthy reception of it.

The holy Council of Trent desires all to receive this Sacrament frequently, if not every day. This statement is borne out by the words of the council. In one place it says: 'This holy Synod, with true fatherly affection, admonishes, exhorts, begs and beseeches, through the bowels of the mercy of our God, that all and each of those who bear the Christian name would now at length agree and be of one mind in this sign of unity, in this bond of charity, in this symbol of concord, and that, mindful of the so great majesty and the so exceeding love of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His own beloved soul as the price of our salvation, and gave His own flesh to eat, they would believe and venerate these sacred mysteries of His Body and Blood with such constancy and firmness of faith, with such devotion of soul, with such piety and worship, as to be able

frequently to receive that supersubstantial bread, and that it may be to them truly the life of the soul, and the perpetual health of the mind' (Sess. xiii., ch. 8). In another place the holy Council declares that it 'would fain indeed that, at each Mass, the faithful who are present should communicate, not only in spiritual desire, but also by the sacramental participation of the Eucharist' (Sess. xxii., ch. 6).

I have nothing to suggest as to the frequency with which you should receive Holy Communion, beyond exhorting you to obey the injunctions of your rule, and the custom which prevails in your holy institute. Do not be guided by any lax observance which you may have witnessed, and do not permit sloth or indifference to lead you to infidelity in receiving Communion when prescribed. It is not by any means a matter of little importance; a great deal depends upon it, as to your spiritual advancement and as to your fervour. Let a sickness or an indisposition be a serious one to deprive you of Holy Mass and of Communion; but, at the same time, resign yourselves to the injunctions of your superiors. When confined to your cell for any length of time by sickness, do not fail to express the desire of being permitted to receive Holy Communion as often as may be. At such a time you need the strength and consolation which it affords.

Let me, however, urge you to give serious attention to your preparation for the reception of so august a Sacrament. Your preparation should not be confined to what is termed the 'immediate preparation'; the 'remote preparation,' which is of the greatest im-

portance, should be the pious and edifying character of your lives, an interior and exterior religiousness of life. This is the truest and best preparation.

When David addressed the assembled chief men of Israel and the officers of the army, and told them of the temple which his son should build, he created a profoundly religious impression upon them by saying: 'The work is great; for a house is prepared not for man, but for God' (1 Par. xxix. 1). Your lives should give evidence that you are impressed by the great act which you perform so often; you too have to prepare a house for God: let your hearts be got ready with all possible reverence and piety for the Divine Guest, who enters them each time that you receive Holy Communion. What recollection, what faithful observance, what dutifulness, what devotion, what careful avoidance of sin and every danger of sin, should mark your daily life! When Solomon at length, having built the temple, dedicated it with a most solemn rite, he addressed himself to God in his prayer of dedication, saying: 'Is it then to be thought that God should indeed dwell upon earth? for if heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built?' (3 Kings viii. 27). So you too, after all your preparation, will yet deem yourselves unworthy of the Divine Guest of the Eucharist. Yet, withal, if you make becoming effort, our Lord will be pleased to accept it. The holy Council of Trent (Sess. xiii., ch. 7) says: 'If it is unbeseeming for anyone to approach to any of the sacred functions unless he approach holily, assuredly the

more the holiness and divinity of this heavenly Sacrament are understood by a Christian, the more diligently ought he to give heed that he approach not to receive it but with great reverence and holiness.' By these words we learn that at least some effort should be made to prepare becomingly for Holy Communion.

While impressing yourselves, therefore, with a high idea of the reverence and the effort towards holiness which this great Sacrament demands in those who are frequent communicants, reflect for a moment upon St. Paul's words, already quoted: 'Let a man prove himself.' Imperfect religious are, alas! to be met with, who do not make a sufficiently careful preparation. There have indeed been cases in which religious have fallen into what may be termed sensual habits of one kind or another. If they have corrected sensuality in one form, they have contracted it in another—sometimes by faults of the appetite, at other times by indulging the body in sloth, at other times, again, by excessive fastidiousness in seeking bodily comforts. In those religious such forms of sensuality, besides involving the commission of many venial sins, were as a heavy weight upon the soul, dragging it down, preventing its correspondence with many graces, and depriving it of countless merits. As time went on, matters, far from improving, became painfully worse; for, as experience teaches, sensuality keeps a strong hold on nature, and enlarges and multiplies its demands. Those religious went as usual to the sacred Table, but in all the misery of their uncorrected sensuality,

to repeat even on the very day of their Communion—as though they had not rightly discerned the Body of the Lord—those same acts of slavery to the body which are so unbecoming in religious, and so destructive of fervour and spirituality. And this went on, as though there was not, all the while, a recording Angel noting the abuse or neglect of the Master's talents of mind and body, of time and grace, and a just God awaiting to deal out in its full measure the punishment—only temporal, perhaps, but yet a Divine punishment—in this world or in the next, merited by such conduct.

Other religious there have been who were guilty of other classes of faults, such as pride, disregard of authority, intriguing and uncharitableness, involving their souls in the guilt of many venial sins, and who, without any serious attempt at amendment, went also as usual to the holy Table. It scarcely needs to be pointed out that a lukewarm religious cannot make more than a lukewarm Communion; and that lukewarmness is an unbecoming disposition for receiving this Divine Sacrament. 'Let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of that Bread.'

See, then, if there are any faults which the eye of your Lord detects in you, and demands that you should correct. Are you perhaps conscious of them, but are you yet wanting in determination to correct them? Are you, as it were, wedded to them? Do not refuse to make the effort which may be required in order to free yourselves from them. Do not fail to use the pruning-knife without mercy in such a case, that, all noxious offshoots being removed, the

plant may be healthy and fruit-bearing. How can a religious pretend that she enters into the proper spirit of preparation for Holy Communion, if she voluntarily repeats faults of which she has promised amendment; if her bearing is worldly or dissipated; if she spends her time in a manner unbecoming a religious; if she wilfully causes disorder or fosters misunderstandings; if, without reasonable excuse, she neglects the exercises which sanctify and render meritorious the religious life which she has embraced; or if she persistently gives disedification in other ways?

You happily have special opportunities of making a pious preparation for receiving Holy Communion; you come before the Blessed Sacrament from time to time, and you have your religious exercises; you have your hours of silence and recollection, and your meditation. Besides these important helps to your devout preparation, you no doubt form the intention of offering up the performance of your various duties for the same end; and thus everything you do is directed towards a fervent reception of this great Sacrament. Oh, if you only turned your opportunities to good account! But if, unhappily, you were to waste or neglect them, and approach with but little reverence, recollection or piety, would you not seem to offer some kind of an indignity to our Divine Lord, seeing that your preparation could so easily be better, and is not?

St. Bonaventure (Tract. de Præpar. ad Miss., c. v.), instructs those who approach the holy Table to examine themselves and see with how much charity

and with what kind of fervour they do so. He warns them against venial sins, because such sins would cause them to be tepid and otherwise indisposed; and he goes on to say that they would receive the Sacrament in an unbecoming manner if they did not approach it reverently, circumspectly, and with due regard. St. Thomas of Villanova (Conc. 2, De Sacramento Altaris) warns the recipients against all irreverence; he recalls the punishments which befell men who only touched the ark, or looked too curiously at it, and he asks what those may expect who contemn our Lord's majesty, seeing that those men were punished by so bitter a death. His words remind us that, with regard to this august Sacrament, our disrespect is not to the figure or emblems, but to the very majesty of Christ Himself. But you scarcely need such warnings; they are meant rather for those who commit the heinous crime of sacrilege. How terrible the punishments which those wicked men bring upon themselves, both in this world and in the next, who profane this magnificent Sacrament, and treat sacrilegiously the Body and Blood of Christ!

On the other hand, what inestimable blessings those will receive who communicate devoutly! The rich and abundant graces which you need in the religious life, to enable you to live up to the perfection of your calling, come especially from the deep pure fountain of the Holy Eucharist. An increase of sanctifying grace, of fervour and charity, of strength and energy, of zeal for God, of detachment from worldly objects, of piety and patience, of

peace and consolation—these are some of the fruits of frequent devout Communion. I say 'devout' Communion, because grace results not only as a direct consequence of a worthy reception of the Sacrament, and in virtue of the efficacy of the Sacrament in itself ('ex opere operato'), but also according to the measure and earnestness of the dispositions of the recipient ('ex opere operantis'). Oh, make, then, a fervent preparation, open wide your hearts, turn your opportunities to good account, that you may derive the abundant fruit of sanctification, spiritual vigour, and consolation which your frequent reception of Holy Communion should yield you; that you may 'draw water with joy out of the Saviour's fountains' (Isa. xii. 3). Your religious soul needs the rich food, the wholesome refection: God in His love has prepared the richest and best of nourishment in this Sacrament; it rests with you to partake of it with desire and with a holy zest, that your soul may be satiated. Herein is the new Passover; here you receive the Divine food which nourished the Apostles, which strengthened the martyrs, and which has fed the confessors and virgins of every age of the Church: join yourselves in spirit with them in this sacred bond of union which unites you to Christ Himself, and in Him to all who form His mystical body, the Saints of all ages. You wish your eyes to be opened—'Lord, that I may see!' you long for a truer and clearer sense of all that our Lord is to you, and of what He demands of you; you desire that holy affection towards Him may be excited in your hearts. 'Come ye to Him,'

says holy David, 'and be enlightened' (Psa. xxxiii. 6). Then, notwithstanding the holy character of your vocation, you have yet your spiritual maladies; you must go to the Divine Physician of your souls, that you may be healed of them. Moreover, in the school of religious perfection you desire to be made conformable to the Model, to the likeness of your Master; if you be nourished by Him, you will become like Him; the conformity will be rendered complete in the next world (1 St. John iii. 2; Rom. viii. 29). You also wish to live in Him, and by Him: 'I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me' (Gal. ii. 20); and you desire never to lose this spiritual life by which Christ lives in you: frequent Communion will give it and preserve it. Finally, you wish for a pledge of everlasting life, that death itself may not terrify you: 'He that eateth this bread shall live for ever' (St. John vi. 59).

Dispose, then, yourselves for this celestial banquet, and approach it with a holy hunger. In this sacramental banquet you become both guest and host: guest because the Great King invites you to His table to partake of the Bread of Life, that Divine food which contains in itself all sweetness—'omne delectamentum in se habentem.' You are the host because our Lord gives Himself to you in this adorable Sacrament, and you entertain Him as your guest. Conceive, if you can, anything more honourable to you. 'Thy friends, O God,' says the Psalmist, 'are made exceedingly honourable' (Psa. cxxxviii. 17).

How invigorating and sanctifying is this sacramental food! At this heavenly banquet you are

refreshed and strengthened. Not in vain do you partake of it; for by it you are rendered formidable to your enemies, and strong to run the way. With holy David you may exclaim: 'The Lord is my Rock and my Strength and my Saviour' (2 Kings xxii. 2). But take away this food of the spiritual life, this sap of the tree, and what will happen? Spiritual life and energy will fail, your souls will languish; the tree will be impoverished and wither. On the other hand, receive this holy Sacrament with frequency and piety, and vigour will be maintained and will increase, the tree will flourish and grow.

At this Divine banquet, not only is the soul refreshed, but it is also consoled—it experiences sweetness. It is your heavenly Spouse who visits you, to impart His consolations, and to give you a foretaste of the joys of the paradise to come. If you really taste the sweetness of this heavenly food and the peace and joy of heavenly consolations, will you go after worldly comforts and pleasures? Will you still prize them? Ah, no; you will be favoured with the desires and relish felt by the Saints. What is earthly, unreal, and passing will lose its attraction for you, it will become insipid; and in your inmost soul you will turn with the instincts of Divine faith and charity to that union with Christ your Lord which begins in the Sacramental Communion, which is not broken off, but which is consummated in inconceivable magnificence and happiness at the everlasting banquet. There, in the life you are hastening to, our Lord will drink of this fruit of the vine with you new in the kingdom of His Father (St. Matt. xxvi. 29).

Although such great things are prepared for you, you must acknowledge with all humility and truth that you are feeble and poor. What power lies in your prayers, unless God opens the treasure of Christ's merits and the fountains of His Divine mercy and compassion? You must cast yourselves at our Lord's feet, and beg that He will Himself prepare your souls for this magnificent Sacrament. St. Thomas of Villanova addressed Him, saying: 'O Lord, only give what Thou commandest, and then command what Thou willest. Joseph did not find gold in the sack of Benjamin his brother, except that which he himself had placed there; neither wilt Thou, O good Jesus, find anything good in our breast except what Thou Thyself dost bestow' (Conc. 3, De Sac. Alt.). From our Lord, then, must you beg the bestowal of the graces which you need to prepare your hearts for a worthy and profitable reception of the Holy Eucharist. But let nothing be wanting in your own endeavour, for sometimes, alas! familiarity begets a spirit of thoughtless routine and unreal piety. Then, let your thanksgiving be in keeping with your fervent preparation, and this holy Sacrament will be to you the bread of the strong, the heavenly manna of your sojourn, the channel of grace, the tree of life, the fountain of Divine consolation, the banquet of love, the pledge of salvation, and the golden ladder by which you shall mount to heaven. God grant that it may be all this to every one of you. 'Eat, then, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.'

XVI.

DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

'Blessed art thou among women.'—ST. LUKE i. 28.

THE two devotions which particularly help and console religious are devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. They give a tone, not only to the individual piety of the members of a community, but also to the very house or convent in which they reside. The religious are the servants of that Divine Lord who dwells in the tabernacle, and who feeds them so often with the heavenly bread of the Holy Eucharist; and they are also the children of Mary, whose statues and pictures adorn their oratory and their dwelling, keeping them ever in mind of their heavenly Queen and Mother. I am now going to remind you of the devotion which you owe to the Blessed Virgin, and of what your relations with her should be.

'Blessed art thou among women,' so said the Angel Gabriel when saluting Mary before the mystery of the Incarnation had been accomplished. A thousand times more blessed is Mary now that she is the veritable Mother of God made man, and the crowned Queen of Angels and men. Elizabeth, filled

with the Holy Ghost, cried out the same: 'Blessed art thou among women.' And Mary in her inspired canticle declared: 'Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.'

With what unfeigned devotion, then, you should honour the Blessed Virgin; and with what a joy it should fill you to render this honour to the Mother of your Lord. You render it to her especially for three reasons: because of her excellence, because of her power, and because of her love.

You cannot but be filled with sentiments of admiration and delight when you consider all Mary's excellences: her excellence in God's predilection, in her dignity, in her graces and privileges, in her virtues, in her merits, and in her glory. Each of these excellences would afford matter for a special conference; let us, however, content ourselves with a brief review of them.

From all eternity God decreed the Incarnation of His Son, and in this decree it was appointed that He should be born into this world. Coexistent with this decree—which dates from eternity, when God alone was, and when all things were determined for its most perfect accomplishment—was the vision, in the Divine mind, of Mary. The Incarnation was not to be without Mary; she was to be the mother of the Word Incarnate. Of Jesus the Eternal Father was one day to say, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' With what predilection did He not regard from all eternity that Mother, to be created by Him endowed with every grace and perfection of which the highest created nature was

capable, who was to be a worthy Mother of this incomparable Son! He, whose eternal mind had decreed due weight, measure, and distance to the countless stars in the firmament, and fitting relations between every sphere, grade, and part of creation, had also with surpassing love and bounty appointed to Mary all those wonderful perfections which should place her far above every creature, angelic or human, in excellences named and unnamed, to fit her for her sublime dignity of Mother of God. Of her Holy Church reads from the Book of Proverbs (viii. 22, 23): 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made.'

If we come to consider the excellence of Mary in her dignity, the first thought that strikes us is that we shall not be able fully to understand this until we have first comprehended the dignity of her Divine Son. Our praise and admiration of the mother of a king, or statesman, or soldier, would accord with the distinction attained by the son. How, then, will it be in Mary's case, seeing that her Son is the very Son of God? There are many Archangels and Apostles, but only one to enjoy Mary's dignity. A Doctor of the Church points out that Mary is more sublime than any other creature, and that above her, but infinitely so, is God, and only God. She is not only the Mother of God, but also the Queen of heaven, of Angels, and of men. How little we know of her greatness!

What shall we say of her graces and privileges?

God has adorned Mary with those rich, abundant, and wonderful graces which made her fit for the dignity to which He raised her. To her have been applied in a more than ordinary way the benefits of redemption. She was conceived without sin, and preserved from the slightest fault; hers was a super-eminent virtue; everything in her—in mind, and heart, and feeling, and in every faculty—was of a special kind and order; her holiness such that no greater could be conceived or could be in any creature.

Then, no virtue was wanting in her, and she was perfect in every virtue. How great her humility! 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.' How complete her obedience! 'Be it done unto me according to Thy word.' How fervent her prayer and praise! 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.' How dutiful her study of God's ways! 'Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.' How tender in her reproaches! 'Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.' How compassionate towards the needy! 'The Mother of Jesus said to Him, They have no wine.' How brave, constant, and patient under suffering! 'There stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother.' How speak of Mary's unalterable meekness, gentleness, purity, charity, and conformity in all things to the Divine will?

Mary's merits, proceeding from her entire correspondence with grace, began the moment of her receiving being, and continued through her beautiful

but sorrowful career until her last breath. She was the daughter of grace, full of grace, and we style her Mother of Divine Grace. What a fund of merit she acquired by her immediate consecration of her whole being and life to God, by her early piety, her obedience to Joachim and Anna, her vow of perpetual virginity, her perfect life in the temple, her devotedness to St. Joseph, her full correspondence with all God's designs in the mystery of the Incarnation, and her love and care of Jesus in Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth! Fresh and rich merits were won upon the death of St. Joseph, and upon the many occasions of the long absence of Jesus during His missionary life. Her merits were magnificently increased during the scenes of the Passion, and at the death and burial of Jesus on Calvary. Then, finally, there were all the merits acquired during those years of patient waiting which succeeded the day of the Ascension, and preceded her peaceful death and Assumption. These are but the outlines of the occasions of merit which we discover in the history of Mary's life. We shall learn in the world to come how full and abundant were her countless merits, and how they exceedingly surpassed those of all the Saints.

Lastly, we see Mary's excellence in her present glory. Her transcendent glory must be measured not only by her countless merits and all her other excellences, including the greatness of her dignity as Mother of God, but also by that special untold glory which, we may believe, was decreed from all eternity by the Three Persons of the ever-adorable

Trinity for this most perfect and most cherished creature, raised by them in greatness far above every other creature, and the object of their condescending complacency. Were we to address Mary by all the exquisite titles by which many of the Fathers of the Church have addressed her, we should yet want words by which adequately to praise this most glorious Queen of Heaven.

All these excellences of your heavenly Mother should beget in you fervent sentiments of admiration, reverence, and love; and these sentiments should manifest themselves in expressions of praise and devotedness. Her excellences are all from God, to whom she sings in heaven her unceasing 'Magnificat,' and she wishes you to join with her in her hymn of thanksgiving and benediction. While, then, you give praise to God for all His works, extol Him also by your admiration, reverence, and love of Mary, in whom are displayed so especially the wonders of the Divine dispensations.

Let us now, in the second place, consider Mary in the greatness of her power. In this we see her relation with us. She is our powerful Advocate with her Divine Son, and the Protectress of the Church.

From the earliest ages Christians who honoured the Apostles and Martyrs honoured also the ever-blessed Mother of our Saviour. Although it is true that for a time, while the world was being initiated into the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion, there may have been no very prominent display of devotion to Mary, which was to come in its own

good time, yet tradition tells us of her servants on Mount Carmel; and we may be sure that the zeal for her honour manifested at the time of the Council of Ephesus was not of sudden growth, but that it was the outcome of a loving memory of Mary, and of devotedness to her, coming down in the Church from Apostolic times. Already had her praises been written by St. Ambrose, St. Epiphanius, St. John Chrysostom, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine. At the Council itself, St. Cyril of Alexandria, in fervid terms, announced Mary's greatness. Later on followed St. Peter Chrysologus, St. Fulgentius, St. Sophronius, and a century later Venerable Bede, St. John Damascene, and St. Tarasius; in the twelfth century, St. Anselm and St. Bernard; in the thirteenth, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure; in the fifteenth, St. Bernardine of Siena; and in the sixteenth, St. Thomas of Villanova. Many of these Saints are honoured as Doctors of the Church. What an array of learned and holy men, who have proclaimed Mary's praises, and handed down in the Church the beautiful tradition of devotion to her! They teach us to look up to Mary as our advocate.

A most striking lesson concerning Mary's relation towards us is given us by the Church. From the earliest ages she has dedicated churches under Mary's invocation. The tradition of St. Mary of the Snow comes to us from the time of Pope Liberius, in the fourth century. The Church, too, has honoured our Lady with many feast-days, and with divine offices to commemorate them.

The power and efficacy of Mary's intercession are especially commemorated upon the Festival of the Holy Rosary, and that of Our Lady, Help of Christians. She is looked up to and honoured as the Protectress of the Church and the Destroyer of heresies. I need only to remind you of St. Dominic's success in destroying the widespread heresy of the Albigenses by the weapon of the rosary.

The sovereign Pontiffs have again and again invited the faithful to throw themselves upon the protection of Mary; they have encouraged them to enrol themselves in her scapular and to recite her rosary. Why all this? In order to instil into the minds of the faithful a firm belief in the power of Mary's intercession, and a devout confidence in its benefit, if exercised in their behalf. We believe that Mary is all-powerful with her Divine Son; we call to mind how our Lord wrought His first recorded miracle, of changing water into wine, at her request. We meditate upon the tender relations existing between the Son and the Mother, and upon Mary's exaltedness in the heavenly kingdom. We recall what we have heard of the favours bestowed through Mary upon both Saints and sinners in every age and in every land. All this forces us to recognise the grandeur of Mary in the power which God has bestowed upon her as the Advocate of men and the Protectress of the Church, and how worthy she is of our honour and confidence on account of it.

We have now, in the third place, to consider that we should honour Mary because of her love. Who are the clients of Mary who have not, at one time

or another, been conscious of her goodness towards them? Has she not answered their prayers? Has she not watched over them, and preserved them by her powerful patronage and protection from many dangers? Perhaps some of you feel that you owe to Mary your vocation to the religious life. 'After her shall virgins be brought to the King' (Psa. xliv. 15). Was it not after you began to realize the beauty and benefit of devotion to the Blessed Virgin that you felt more drawn to piety and to distaste for the world, and finally to a desire to consecrate your lives to God? And have you not in religion been sensible of her care of you? Do not imagine that in all this your conjectures arise from any delusion; for consider how natural it is for you to expect some tokens of Mary's love. You look for these tokens because, as you are the object of our Lord's love, it must follow that His holy Mother also will love you; and because, being yourselves devout towards your heavenly Mother, she will in return repay you by her favours.

Who so well as Mary understood or understands the unspeakable love which her Divine Son bears for mankind? The mystery of Divine love will never in its full meaning and measure be comprehended by us, but we may contemplate some of its displays. God becomes man, and lives and suffers and dies for man; God comes on earth to instruct and guide man, and to leave in a Church founded by Him on earth Divine agencies for man's benefit, sanctification, and salvation. God, assuming human nature, raises it up even to a participation, in the sense

meant by St. Peter, with the Divine nature (1 St. Pet. i. 4); and He takes a human heart with which to love man even with human affection and tender human feeling. Mary, of all others, read the meaning and took the measure of all this love; and she, in the sphere of her own admirable vocation, ministered in part to the accomplishment of these mysteries of God's love of man, so that she is even styled the Co-redemptrix of mankind; and the pious opinion is held that God, who decreed to give to the world His Son through Mary, has also decreed that all graces merited for the world by the Son should pass through the hands of the Mother.* Be persuaded, then, that Mary loves you if only because Jesus loves you, and because of her zeal for the realization of His designs in you.

Remember, too, how it was on the Cross that our Divine Saviour committed us all in the person of St. John to the care of His Mother. To Mary He said, 'Woman, behold thy Son,' and to St. John, 'Behold thy Mother' (St. John xix. 26, 27). As our Lord has united us all to Himself in that mystical body, of which He Himself is the Head, and as He thus, in a spiritual sense, lives in us, Mary sees in all of us the image of her Divine Son, and she will continue to do so while this mystical union lasts; that is, she will continue to do so until we deserve to be reprobated by her Son. Does not this account for the continuance of her prayers even for sinners? They have not yet fallen under reprobation, and she will

* 'Nihil nos Deus habere voluit quod per Mariæ manus non transiret.'—St. Bernard.

yet strive for their conversion and salvation. What confidence, then, you should feel in Mary's love of you! for you have not lost grace by sin, but you are the spouses of Christ her Son, consecrated to His love; and, moreover, you receive Him frequently in Holy Communion.

Consider, too, that Mary loves you because of your devotion to her. Following the instincts of Catholic piety, you began early to look upon Mary as your heavenly Mother, and you practised devotion to her. This devotion increased with your years. You loved to recite the 'Hail Mary' and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin; you were invested in her scapular; you used her beads; you kept her festivals with devotion; you knelt before her altar or her statue to invoke her intercession. Then when you entered religion, you did all this, and more, to give proof of your love and devotedness to Mary. Can you believe, if your piety has been genuine, that Mary has been indifferent to these manifestations of your devotion? Instances are on record of Mary's having obtained the grace of conversion and salvation for sinners who had been faithful to some slight practice of devotion to her; what, then, may you not hope for, seeing that your practices of devotion have been so special and so constant? Not a single 'Hail Mary' or pious ejaculation is lost sight of; not a rosary, or Litany, or meditation, or visit that is not noted and remembered. By your pious practices in Mary's honour you have been laying by and storing up for yourselves benedictions, which she will shower upon you as you need them, or as they will be beneficial

to you; and in this way she will manifest her love of you. Blessed are you in your devotion to Mary; blessed are all who love Mary. Holy Church does not hesitate to apply to the client of Mary the words of the Book of Proverbs: 'Blessed is the man . . . that watcheth daily at my gates' (viii. 34). Be assured, then, that Mary loves you, both because her Divine Son loves you and because you are devout to her.

Let it, then, be to you both a duty and a joy to honour the ever-blessed and immaculate Mother of God; join with fervour in your praises of her with the faithful of every age: 'Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed' (St. Luke i. 48). She merits your praises, your reverence, your confidence, and your love, because of her exaltedness and excellence, because of her power, and because of her love. Alas for those Christians who dishonour or neglect to honour Mary! God has raised her above all Angels and Saints to a greatness and glory which are unique. She is therefore entitled, whether we recognise the fact or not, to all the honour, respect, and devotion which may be paid to a creature. God will vindicate her honour; He will hold us accountable for any disrespect shown to Mary, and, possibly, for any wilful neglect in devotion towards her. What will be the feelings of heretics and bad Catholics, and all who are remiss in devotion to the Blessed Virgin, when they shall in the next world see what honour God required to be paid to her whom He raised up to be the Mother of His Son!

Be zealous in availing yourselves of every help to your sanctification and salvation. The intercession of the Blessed Virgin and her powerful patronage must be reckoned as such a help. How many are the occasions on which you feel the need of help and comfort! upon these occasions have recourse to Mary. But that you may more fully merit her regard, let your devotion to her be constant. What a blessing and consolation this devotion will prove to you! St. Anselm assures us that all who turn to Mary, and whom she pays attention to, will most certainly be saved.* You will place yourselves under her care when approaching the Sacraments; you will implore her help whenever temptation arises; you will cast yourself in spirit at her feet in your difficulties, troubles, and sorrows; you will honour her as your heavenly Mother, Queen, Lady, Mediatrix, and Advocate. If such is your practice, you may be confident of Mary's love, care, and protection, which will be a sweet comfort to you while you are tossed about on the stormy sea of life, but especially as you prepare to enter the harbour of eternal repose.

* 'Sicut omnis, O Beatissima, a te aversus et a te despectus, necesse est ut intereat; ita omnis ad te conversus et a te respectus, impossibile est ut pereat.'—St. Anselm.

SIXTH DAY.

XVII.

THE WAY OF THE SAINTS.

'You are fellow-citizens with the saints.'—EPH. ii. 19.

AMONG the many tracks in life which those who have gone before us have left, we should carefully seek that one which we may call the 'way of the Saints.' The 'just made perfect' have trodden before us the path of the evangelical counsels; they edified the Church during the few years of their exile on earth, and they passed to their reward. We have, it is true, the lessons of our Lord's doctrine and the lustre of His example, and these we frequently study in our meditations; but we may also derive benefit from contemplating the lives of the Saints, those friends of the Bridegroom who stood and heard Him, and rejoiced with joy because of the Bridegroom's voice (St. John iii. 29), that they may be our guides in putting our Divine Master's lessons into practice. We do not pretend to the exalted grace which God bestowed upon His special friends and servants, and we know that we do not possess

the sublime gifts and supernatural favours which were vouchsafed to them. We do not put ourselves on a line with them; rather, we venerate them. We offer them the worship due to God's Saints; but we cannot forget that they were clothed with the same humanity which is ours, and that they passed their lives in spheres of labours and trials, such as are those spheres in which we, by the providence of God, have been placed. So St. Paul tells us: 'You are fellow-citizens with the Saints.'

Let me therefore exhort you to stamp upon your lasting remembrance the consoling assurance that God calls you to that way of life which shall lead you to the kingdom of glory which the Saints have reached, and in which it shall be your happy lot to join with them in singing for ever the praises of God. How good is God, to have created you for so sublime a vocation! Well, keep it before you, that you may not be led aside from it by the wiles and temptations of the Evil One, by the delusive attractions and false pleasures of the world, or by the insidious influence of the vicious inclinations of fallen nature. Yes, God truly calls you to that way which leads to eternal life, of which our Lord has said: 'How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it' (St. Matt. vii. 14).

We are not going to study the life of any particular Saint, nor yet the lessons drawn from the lives of several particular Saints. What I invite you to consider are the characteristics of the Saints generally, those chief points or features which are

observable in the lives of the Saints. If these considerations assist you in any way in discovering where your own efforts fail, they should not be without profit. Just as the young look up to their elders, just as the novices look up to their teachers and trainers, so may all of us look up to the Saints, to see in what they excelled, and in what spirit they served God. If we look in any other direction, we are in danger of being misdirected by what is disedifying, and of being drawn down to a lower level of conduct; but if we take the Saints for our guides, they will lead us to a more perfect life. I dare not presume to believe that there is any religious in this community who is unwilling—I will not say to correct what is faulty—but I say who is unwilling to shape her conduct by a more perfect gauge and standard. What you are all sensible of is that you are far from the perfection of the Saints, and that you would gladly strive after a nearer approach to their sanctity. Let me assure you that such a disposition is the result of the working of Divine grace in you, and you must foster it with humility, but with constancy, and God will aid you to advance in perfection.

Let our first reflection be that there are two ways to heaven—namely, the path of innocence and the path of true repentance; one is just as truly a way as the other, because, as a matter of fact, God has revealed to us that we may reach heaven by either one or the other. Some Saints have reached heaven by the way of innocence, and some by the way of penance or true repentance. St. Peter, St. Mary

Magdalen, St. Augustine, St. Mary of Egypt, St. Margaret of Cortona, St. Camillus of Lellis, and others, are illustrious examples of true repentance, who reached the heavenly reward, not by the way of innocence, but by that of penance. There are other Saints who had at one time of their lives been indifferent in the service of God, as, for example, St. Anselm and St. John of God; and we remember how St. Teresa reproached herself with loving the world too much. Be not disheartened, then, if your conscience has in the past been burdened by serious infidelities, and even by mortal sin, provided that you have repented of your sins. While lamenting, as you may continue to do, your sinfulness, your indifference in God's service, and your ingratitude, do not permit your mind to be weighed down by discouragement, but excite yourselves to a great faith in God's infinite mercy, and to an unbounded confidence in His goodness. Some who have sinned more grievously than you have been led by grace to great holiness.

The first characteristic, however, which we will note in the Saints is their horror of sin, and of all that tends to draw men into sin. This feeling, the result of grace, seemed as an instinct in those Saints who ever preserved their baptismal innocence; and in those who were saved by the way of penance, it was engendered at the moment of their repentance. You must not, however, suppose that, because they were happily influenced by a supernatural horror of sin, they were therefore freed from temptations to sin, and from the molestations of the arch-enemy of man.

This would be an unreal view of the lives of the Saints. How many of them owe their crowns to the victories gained over their temptations! Let me remind you of the trials of St. Catharine of Siena, of which I spoke in the conference on holy chastity; how her mind and imagination were attacked by evil thoughts and frightful pictures. Our Lord assured her that these troubles were a source of merit to her, since she abhorred them and rejected them. St. Anthony and others were subjected to very violent assaults. So let us be assured that the Saints were not without their temptations. Let us, however, be equally assured that they did not advance as excuses for yielding to them the power of the temptations or the frailty of nature, but that they were deeply impressed with a dread and horror of offending God, and that they shrank and recoiled from every voluntary moral fault. Let me also ask you not to suppose that the Saints were without certain faults of character and defective mannerism, or that they were never guilty of errors of judgment, and never held mistaken views; they would have been more than human if they had been entirely free from such failings and errors. But remember that these failings and errors might exist without any moral fault. Sometimes it is said that certain Saints are rather to be admired than imitated; of others it is remarked, that it must have been trying to live with them. Just so; but what I wish to invite you to imitate is their supernatural dread of sin, that is, of moral guilt. In this matter be genuine, be firm and unyielding. Do not imitate,

by fickleness and by courting danger, the moth, which flits round about the candle until at last it gets burned and falls. When there is question of sin, do not in condescension to others, or with a view to making a compromise with your unwarranted desires, step upon the inclined plane; it is the fatal slope which leads to the precipice. Such is the time when your love of God is put to the test: turn to Him in fervent supplication, and continue to pray till the full light of grace shows you the danger and reveals all its dark possibilities—till the holy and sweet aid and attraction of grace draw you safely away from the evil. This is what the Saints did; this is the path in which you must strive to follow them. I do not suggest that you should adopt those severe measures towards yourselves which they employed, both to punish themselves for their faults, and so far to correct and subdue nature as to render themselves more like Angels on earth than men; but I call it to your minds, to convince you of the absolute earnestness with which they aimed at purity of heart and innocence of life. Without a similar earnestness of purpose, though it may not be as fervent and generous as theirs, you will have many faults to atone for. Set your faces, then, earnestly against every voluntary offence against Almighty God, and by prayer, piety, and the fervent reception of the holy Sacraments, seek the grace necessary to maintain yourselves in so holy a resolve.

I may mention here, in only a passing way, how different was the conduct of the Saints with regard to their own faults from that which they pursued

with regard to the faults of their neighbour. First of all, they were very much in earnest in discovering their own faults ; while, except when required to do so by duty or charity, they did not seek to know the faults of their neighbour. Secondly, they were very severe in dealing with their own faults, while they dealt leniently with the faults of their neighbour. Thirdly, they never sought excuse, or sheltered themselves under an excuse, when it was a case of their own fault, while their charity led them to seek every excuse for their neighbour when detected in any fault. And lastly, while the sight of their own fault filled them with indignation against themselves, and a sense of their misery and weakness and guilt, the sight of their neighbour's fault filled them with compassion and a desire to do them good. Study in all this the signs of true holiness, and strive to profit by the lessons contained in such conduct on the part of the Saints. The exercise of charity is called for by our Lord in our relations not only with such as edify, but also with those who have the misfortune to disedify. Let us excuse, if we can ; let us be slow to condemn ; let us be even slower to speak of the fault ; but let us be always ready to pray for the one who offends, and to humble ourselves with the thought that we may even yet do worse ourselves, being mindful of St. Paul's warning : ' He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed, lest he fall ' (1 Cor. x. 12). Let us also fear to usurp judgment, for St. Paul warns us, saying : ' Who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? To his own lord he standeth or falleth ' (Rom. xiv. 4). And our

Lord Himself has said: 'Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned' (St. Luke vi. 37).

But let us now pass on, to consider another characteristic of the Saints—their thoroughness, their whole-heartedness in pursuing their vocation. It is not enough for the servant not to offend his master; he must also render efficient and dutiful service. The Saints were not only fearful of offending God by sin; they were also devotedly given to His service: witness, St. Paul, St. Gregory the Great, St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Charles, St. Teresa, St. Catharine of Siena, St. Bernard. Read especially the lives of the holy founders of religious orders and those of canonized religious. These Saints immolated themselves as holocausts upon the altar of religion. They did not enter religion only to enjoy the blessings of seclusion from the tumult and annoyance of the world, and the satisfaction resulting from the society of the virtuous; they embraced the holy state of religion under the call of God, and with a view to devote themselves to His service. They knew, of course, that their vocation was to a more perfect life, but it did not enter into their minds that it was to be a life of ease, of perfect peace, for they knew that it was to be one of self-sacrifice. Having put their hands to the plough, they did not look back, and retracting nothing from their self-immolation, they persevered in the path of their vocation, and they were found worthy of the kingdom of God.

I invite you to see what place 'self' has in your service. You know that you cannot at the one time

serve God and Mammon; be persuaded, too, that you cannot, in your beautiful vocation, serve both God and self. If self has a hold upon your affections, if it occupies your thoughts and is the object of your attentions, there must necessarily be some holding back of devotedness in your pursuit of your vocation, and some failing to comply with the perfect spirit of your holy rule. The end of your holy institute, the requirements of your rule, have not the service of 'self' in view, but the immolation of self at the shrine of religion. This is the noble sacrifice which the Saints made; and then realizing that they no longer belonged to themselves, they looked to their holy rule and to their superiors for their future guidance, and they entered with all their hearts into the accomplishment of the duties of their state.

How different, alas! from this thoroughness, this whole-heartedness, this self-immolation, is the spirit of religious whose minds are fixedly centred in themselves, their comforts, their conveniences, their pleasures, their ease! It is painful to meet at times with religious of this kind; their thoughts for their neighbour, their devotedness to their charge, come second to the absorbing consideration of themselves. What pain, therefore, this great imperfection of theirs gives to those around them, and especially to their superiors, who regret to see what merit they lose for themselves, and what gain they deprive others of. If the Saints had been deterred by fatigue, anxiety, love of repose, fear of inconvenience, undue regard for health, fastidiousness, by cold or heat, or other such considerations, how slow would have

been the progress of their sanctification, and how poor the record of their achievements for the good of their neighbour! Yet there are religious with whom these considerations weigh unduly. To correct themselves, they should—besides exciting themselves by the edifying example of the Saints and of zealous religious—call to mind their own first fervour, and they should study earnestly the spirit of their rule; they are not asked to advance beyond their rule, but to take their inspiration from it, and to conform themselves to it.

In keeping with this thoroughness of the Saints was their sincerity. They were sincere in their dealings with God and with their neighbour. Their piety and their charity were not superficial, but deep, interior and genuine, and therefore equal to the test and to the strain to which they were put. Just as many words and many attestations do not constitute friendship, neither do many prayers constitute piety. In the Saints earnestness did not exist only in the time of prayer, but also in their spirit of recollection and throughout the accomplishment of their duties, all of which were performed for God's sake. In this way they were sincere with God: piety was not assumed and discarded like a garment; it was a spirit which pervaded their soul and moulded their lives.

If we examine their charity towards their neighbour, we shall see in this also a proportionate earnestness: it arose from this, that they loved their neighbour for God's sake. This made their charity true and disinterested. Witness St. Paul's profession

to the Corinthians: 'I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls' (2 Cor. xii. 15). There was no deception, no envy, no undermining of the neighbour's character or position, no using of the neighbour for their own ends. St. Paul went on to say: 'Although loving you more, I be loved less.' We must not alter the genuineness of our charity, even when the means which it leads us to adopt cause us to be less appreciated than we deserve. Sincere charity will be well ordered; it will cause us to give our first consideration to our neighbour's eternal interests. It will also be enduring; it will continue to manifest itself even under difficulties and opposition. Such was the charity of St. Francis of Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Philip Neri.

I shall not prolong these considerations by referring at length to other striking characteristics observable in the Saints, such as their remarkable patience, their self-denial, their humility, their ready obedience, and others. Let me content myself with asking you to study those upon which we have dwelt. How happy you will be if, having found the path by which the Saints made their way to their glorious reward, you feel drawn to tread it too! In your pursuit of it there may, through human frailty, be some faltering; but be fully resolved that there shall be no deliberate going back. In all humility, but in all confidence, ask God to draw you to it, and to preserve you upon it, by the sweet attraction and support of His holy grace. What heavenly favours and what rich merit will be yours, if, walking in the path of the Saints, you love justice and hate iniquity, if you

perform fully all that you undertook to do when you made your religious profession, if you withhold from God nothing which He demands of you, and if there is a genuine earnestness in your piety and in your charity! Beware of seeking light and leading from the tepid and indevout, from the disaffected and unobservant; they do not themselves relish as they ought the things which are of God, nor do they taste true peace: whither, therefore, can they be expected to guide those whom they counsel? There are, alas! many who tread the imperfect way; go not by it. The Holy Ghost promises to sustain you if you strive to follow the way of the Saints, for the royal Psalmist says: 'You that love the Lord, hate evil: the Lord preserveth the souls of His Saints, He will deliver them out of the hand of the sinner' (Psa. xcvi. 10). The Sacred Heart of your Divine Lord claims a fervent and faithful service at your hands, in return for which it will comfort you with interior peace and many consolations.

You should wish to be confirmed in those qualities which insure perseverance; solid virtue and not fitful devotion, patient and continuous effort and not sudden enthusiasm, will guarantee that progress in perfection without which perseverance will be precarious. You are making for a goal, let every step be a forward one; you are fighting for a glorious crown, let every blow be sure and effective. Our Lord has said: 'He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved' (St. Matt. x. 22).

While striving to walk in the way of the Saints, invoke their intercession. Place yourselves especi-

ally under the powerful protection of our Blessed Lady, of St. Joseph, and of your holy Patrons. Be ever on the watch for that happy consummation of the religious life which awaits the devout religious. How great shall be your reward when your watching shall be at an end, and the Bridegroom shall come; for it is written: 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints' (Psa. cxv. 15). May God give you to realize ever more and more the perfection to which He calls you, and to undertake what would be in keeping with your dignity! For, as St. Paul reminds you, 'you are fellow-citizens with the Saints.'

XVIII.

HUMAN FRAILTY.

'I am needy and poor; O God, help me.'—PSA. lxix. 6.

As you have progressed in the course of this retreat, you have discovered in yourselves many shortcomings, and you have been struck by your weakness in many respects. You have been convinced that you should aim at great interior and exterior religiousness; and under this conviction you have perhaps stood confused and confounded by the knowledge of your imperfect virtue and piety. Happy you, if this knowledge has led you to humble yourselves before God, and beseech Him for His help and grace to enable you to become more pleasing in His sight, and worthier instruments in His hands for the accomplishment of the works confided to your holy institute! It is not even now too late to incite yourselves to such sentiments, and to address to God such a prayer. How great is human frailty, how universal! It is met with even in the sphere of religious life, and in the aged and advanced as well as in the young and inexperienced. The more you reflect upon it, the more thoroughly will you become convinced that holiness is not a

growth of nature, but the fruit of supernatural grace. What wonder, then, if you find in yourselves traces of human frailty; the wonder would be if there were none. But yet your life-struggle must be to remove them; while they remain, humble yourselves because of them; your humiliation will be to you a gain in grace and merit, to compensate you for what you lose by your weaknesses and imperfections. In view of these you may exclaim with David: 'I am needy and poor;' let not, however, your extreme want discourage you: for God is good, compassionate and bountiful; so say also with David: 'O God, help me.' You will not pray in vain, if you pray constantly and with earnestness and confidence. If you keep in view only your own weakness, you will be overcome by a sense of insufficiency, misgiving and alarm, and this will interfere with your spiritual energy and progress, and undermine your religious life; you must ever look up to God with childlike trust, and this will inspire you with courage and constancy.

It is true that human frailty impedes and undoes the work of grace; but let your mistrust of yourselves, arising from a sense of your frailty, be accompanied by great faith and confidence in the assistance, protection, and providence of God. Whether you consider the work of your personal sanctification, or the duties imposed upon you by your state and employment, what a source of consolation it should be to you to feel that you are never alone, that you are not left to yourselves, that God is with you! I do not attempt to conjecture in what way,

and how far, God is present with a religious who is unfaithful to the strict obligations of her vocation; and if, in view of His care of others, God will prevent her from doing harm, or will bless any of her works. But God will be ever at hand to assist His faithful servants in their labours and under their trials, and this should inspire them with consolation and confidence.

You find that the work of your personal sanctification is an anxious one. It is a healthy sign if you feel this; for the indifferent religious has no anxiety about it in her case. What, I ask, makes it an anxious work? The anxiety arises from such causes as these: your spiritual weakness, your proclivity to evil, your want of resolution and religious energy, the power of your passions, the dangers by which you are beset on account of your surroundings, or, finally, the snares and temptations of the devil. You will be subject to anxiety, at one time or another, upon all these scores, as long as you are on earth; but, notwithstanding your frailty, it does not follow that you will fall and be lost. God, who offers to all the graces necessary for salvation, never fails to vouchsafe to you the grace to avoid mortal sin, by which alone you can be lost. It is because the sinner by his own act rejects the grace, that he falls, and that therefore he becomes personally guilty, and amenable to the punishment due to his sin. This assurance of the Divine assistance should be to you a source of great consolation. You will not be overcome and fall into mortal sin—no matter how great your frailty or how strong the temptation—unless you

fall with deliberation and consent on your part, rejecting the grace which God proffers to sustain and save you. You should not fail, when under temptation, to seek this grace by fervent prayer, and to correspond with it. Happily, you are so minded and resolved, and so bound by charity to God, as to be determined never to consent to mortal sin. Therefore, confiding in God's promised aid, you may feel happy and assured; and you may, with mistrust, however, in yourselves, exclaim with David: 'In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded' (Psa. xxx. 2); and use also these other expressive words of his: 'Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death'—that is, of mortal sin—'I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me' (Psa. xxii. 4).

Human frailty manifests itself also in those lesser faults which do not constitute an absolute revolt against God. Who, indeed, is free from venial sin? As to these lesser faults, you are not guaranteed against falling into venial sin, which is not of itself an obstacle to your salvation, although an impediment to your sanctification. God's grace is all-powerful; but human nature is weak, and your evil proclivities may be strong; consequently you may not always avail yourselves fully of grace. You may be surprised in many faults. If you would avoid every deliberate venial sin—and this you should endeavour to do—you must walk in the way of the Saints, and practise great self-denial, circumspection, and constant fervent prayer. You may not attain this perfection of charity; I invite you there-

fore, while aspiring to it, to humble yourselves on account of your venial faults, to strive to avoid them as far as possible, and to atone for them, day by day, by your sorrow joined to your prayers and good works, especially the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Endeavour at the same time—and this recommendation is of the utmost importance—to root out of your hearts all affection for them; for while you remain attached to these faults your repentance will be unreal, and your purpose of amendment futile. But lift up your hearts and your voices to God; if you are in proper dispositions, and if you try to avoid the deliberate commission of venial sin, you may be filled with confidence that He will bestow His grace to enable you to do so. It is scarcely to be expected that any of us will be made free of all human frailty in this life. 'In many things,' St. James says, 'we all offend' (iii. 2). Then, our grace, we know, will be 'according to the measure of the giving of Christ' (Eph. iv. 7), and on our side there are not merits, but demerits. But be consoled by the thought of the great goodness of God in preserving you from many grievous sins, and of the mercy which He has always shown you; and be filled with confidence in the continued aid of His holy grace. And be not disconcerted or envious, if to others is given a larger measure of grace than that which is accorded to you, and if therefore they surpass you in the perfection of their lives. Bless and praise God, not only for His unspeakable goodness to you, but also for all the favours which He bestows upon others, and for all His works.

Human frailty is the cause of your sluggishness in the acquirement of the perfection of the holy state which you have embraced, and of the Christian and religious virtues. Is it not the case that, although you do not fall into mortal sin, and although you endeavour not to commit deliberate venial sin, you have yet to acknowledge that you are far from being advanced in virtue? Should you not, on this account, exclaim with David, 'I am needy and poor; O God, help me'? If you only persevere in your efforts, and turn to the best account the graces you receive, such conduct will prove an antidote against your frailty; and you may console yourselves with the assurance that God will yet enable you to attain that degree of perfection to which you are called. In the meantime keep yourselves in humility by the knowledge of your backwardness, and in peace of mind, by a firm confidence in God's goodness and in the help of His grace.

Human frailty will make itself manifest, by fickleness, infidelity and incompleteness in the discharge of your duties, and in the course of your actions. Our Lord may have to address to you the message which He sent by St. John to the Bishop of Sardis: 'I find not thy works full before My God' (Apoc. iii. 2). Without giving way to despondency, you must only try to be more earnest, if you desire to please your Divine Master, and to partake of the 'hidden manna' (Apoc. ii. 17) of His consolations, reserved for those servants who have a zeal to please Him. Especially, perhaps, does human frailty manifest itself by irresolution, cowardice, and impatience

under the difficulties which arise in the fulfilment of the duties of your office or employment. What if this be the case? You should weigh well, and in a religious spirit, what is required of you, and the conditions under which you discharge your duties. If, as religious, you find yourselves placed in a certain sphere of action which is attended by many cares and anxieties, and perhaps by much labour, recognise that it is God who, through your superiors, has placed you in it. A religious actuated by faith and piety, although she may feel the weight of her charge, will not be discouraged under it; whereas the self-reliant and unspiritual religious will be borne down, not only by the responsibility, but also by the difficulties of the charge, and by the disappointments she meets with. One of the sources of satisfaction found in religion is that your charge and your sphere of labour are appointed to you by your superiors, and are accepted by you in a spirit of obedience. Let, then, your hope and confidence be, that God, for whose sake you have undertaken the labour, and in whose name it has been imposed upon you, will bless your efforts. The work is His, and you are only His humble instruments in its accomplishment. All that is asked of you is that you will be dutiful, and use the means which should be adopted for its success.

When the people of Israel carried their murmurings to Moses, he addressed himself to God, saying, 'Why hast Thou laid the weight of all this people upon me?' (Num. xi. 11). The charge had been imposed upon Moses by God, and therefore he carried

all the troubles of it to God. Though God often inflicted severe punishment upon the offending people, He yet heard the prayers of Moses, and honoured and recompensed him, not holding him accountable for the people's obstinacy and many sins.

Ecclesiasticus says: 'Every excellent work shall be justified; and the worker thereof shall be honoured therein' (xiv. 21). How excellent the works of your institute! Only be found faithful, and, as the labourer is worthy of his hire, you may feel confident that, grace helping you, you will yet reach the end of your toil, and that God will call you to the promised recompense. 'Work your work before the time,' says again the holy writer, 'and He will give you your reward in His time' (Ecclus. li. 38).

I offer you these thoughts to encourage and console you under the misgivings which may arise in you on account of your human frailty. You belong to God, and you are working for God; you can therefore always turn to Him with trust and confidence, and say to Him: 'This is Thy work, help me! I am needy and poor; O God, help me!'

There are some phases of despondency and mistrust of self which almost fill up the cup of human misery, and which therefore may be deemed to be allied with human frailty, and to deserve consideration in connection with it.

Let us consider three classes of persons who are troubled by feelings of despondency; and let us try to find a remedy for this spiritual malady, or suggest thoughts for their correction and comfort.

There are some persons who feel despondent by reason of the past. No acts seem to come so well from them as acts of contrition. Is it not possible that there is some imperfection in this? Are these persons unintentionally manifesting a want of confidence in God's mercy, or in the efficacy of sacramental absolution? Upon your sincere repentance, you should lose that sense of discomfiture and pain which you felt at your fall; and the pardon of your sins should have brought you a sense of having been forgiven, a sense of peace restored. The remembrance of your sin, which should renew your regret, should ever be accompanied by the remembrance of the mercy shown to you; and this should give rise to a renewal of your thankfulness. God is worshipped by both these affections. But if your satisfaction in making acts of contrition, rather than other acts, arises from a continued misgiving about your having been pardoned, then, if no reasonable grounds exist for such misgiving, you should correct this imperfection, which is injurious to you, by eliciting acts of faith in the goodness, mercy, and love of God. Reasonable grounds for misgiving would be your continued repetition of the sin, your want of amendment. But while you are moved to repeat your acts of contrition, you clearly manifest your sorrow and detestation of your sin; and this ought to satisfy you that your repentance was genuine, and that you ought to be at peace about your past sins.

Other persons are ever despondent about the present. This is a severe form of trial, under which

you should know how to act. With these persons there is a sense of being unequal to the difficulties, trials, and duties of the hour; they become a cause of worry to themselves and to others. It would almost seem that such persons had lost all thought of the tender Providence which watches over us all, which measures to the strength or weakness of every one of us the burden which we are to carry. It is not pretended that you have no effort to make, and no labour to endure; but your spirit of faith, and your sense of confidence in God, should be such as to teach you to leave to His Divine arrangement the issue of your works, undertakings, afflictions, and trials, and to proceed in all things and at all times in a spirit of conformity with His will. Over-anxiety, despondency, and mistrust are failings which not only displease God, and impede the bestowal of His favours, but which also cause the loss of peace to yourselves, and deprive you of much merit. Your duty, then, is to renew your confidence in God, and to desire only what God wills; and this should remove the sense of despondency, and give you a hopeful and calm mind.

There is also a class of persons who take a gloomy or over-anxious view of the future. They fear the troubles it may have in store for them; their misgiving about their own frailty predisposes them to fall again into some bad habit or unfortunate failing; they do not see how they are to maintain their present fervour; they would like to know something consoling about the future; its uncertainty causes them anxiety; they are especially disconcerted by the

thought of death, and the notions which they form of the kind of death which theirs may be. What remedy must be offered you, if such be your case? Think on what our Lord has said: 'Be not . . . solicitous for to-morrow: for the morrow will be solicitous for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof' (St. Matt. vi. 34). While your conduct does not give serious cause to arouse your misgivings about the future, the virtue of hope demands that you trust in God, with a full and unshaken confidence that He will give you every grace necessary for your salvation. But if your lives need correction, then necessarily you must seek the grace of repentance and true amendment; and you must trust in the mercy and goodness of God, that He will grant you this grace, and that it will be ample and efficacious. We read in the 'Imitation of Christ' that when a certain devout person—most likely the author of the work—was anxious about the future, and said, 'If I did but know that I shall still persevere!' an interior voice replied: 'And if thou didst know this, what wouldst thou do? Do now what thou wouldst then do, and thou shalt be very secure' (Book I., Chap. xxv.). The devout person thereupon committed himself to the Divine will, and his trouble of mind ceased. While, therefore, you place no obstacles to God's merciful designs, while you strive to accomplish the duties of your holy calling, and avail yourselves of the means of salvation, there is no reason why you should not keep yourselves in peace about the future. You are in God's hands; He has His designs concerning you. Do you not trust

Him? Ask yourselves of what practical utility your despondency will be to you. Of none whatever; whereas your confidence in God (of which I shall treat in another conference) will bring you help from on high.

What an instructive example of this holy confidence you behold in David, who, with all his piety, was not, you know, without his failings! Listen to his expressions of trust and hope: 'In the Lord I put my trust' (Psa. x. 2); 'The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?' (Psa. xxvi. 1); 'Thou art my strength and my refuge' (Psa. xxx. 4); 'Hope in God' (Psa. xli. 6). Imitate David in your trust in God: you are painfully conscious of your frailty; but let God be your support at the present, and your hope for the future. As to your future, then, in this world, it is in God's hands; leave it there with full confidence, and with entire conformity to the Divine will.

In conclusion, I invite you to seek support and protection from your holy rules. It is admitted that human frailty is great, that it manifests itself in many ways, and that it is likely to accompany you through life. You will find shelter, guidance, and strength in observing the wise prescriptions of your holy rules. They mark out for you the path which you should tread, the precautions which you should employ, the means which you should use, to reach without fail the perfection of your state in this world, and the promised land of your heavenly reward in the world to come. What line of conduct will you

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follow with security, if not the one delineated in that holy code?

You need not to go in this direction or in that, in search of a guide for a manner of life which shall be a sure and reassuring one; you have it clearly mapped out for you in your holy rules. Your book of rules conveys in every page wise lessons and directions; the observances of your religious life are holy, sanctifying, and meritorious. If you perform, day by day and week by week, dutifully and piously, the duties and exercises marked out for you, you will receive all the graces you need to combat human frailty, and to live in religion in a manner pleasing to God. God will reward, in many ways, your fidelity and piety, and watch over you with a loving, special providence. Your daily life will be a daily preparation for a happy death; and you may with confidence expect to receive from God that supreme and crowning grace of final perseverance which —though beyond the reach of all merit—is not withheld in our Lord's promises; for He has said—and let His words urge you onward to victory—'Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life' (Apoc. ii. 10).

Build up, then, dear sisters, by this rule and plumb-line the walls in whose strength and protection you mean to trust, and you will make them firm and impregnable. God, who guides the hand of holy founders in drawing up the rules which their children are to follow, will bless in many ways those who are faithful in observing them. You cannot continue to neglect your religious exercises without

serious spiritual detriment; whereas your faithful observance of them will preserve you from many faults, indiscretions, and dangers to which human frailty exposes you. Let this be your firm hope and confidence; and strive ever to walk in that way of regular observance, by which so many saintly religious have proceeded and reached their crown. 'Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight steps with your feet; that no one, halting, may go out of the way' (Heb. xii. 12, 13).

XIX.

RECOURSE TO THE SACRED HEART.

'Come to Me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.'—ST. MATT. xi. 28.

WITH these words of our Lord, so full of tenderness, I invite you to draw near to the Sacred Heart. In the Sacred Heart, the foundation of all graces, you will find light, strength, and consolation. There is room within it, not only for the faithful soul, but even for the repentant soul which is weary of sin; none will be rejected from it who seek humbly, earnestly and confidently, mercy, fortitude and peace. Do you not see and understand why our Lord clothed Himself with our humanity—why, as St. Paul tells us, He 'emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant' (Phil. ii. 7)? Was it not, besides the reason of the supreme mystery of redemption accomplished in His sacred humanity, that God might bring Himself nearer to His servants, to be comprehended by them more fully, to be felt more really, and to be bound more closely to them by the ties of a common nature (1 St. John i. 1); that, as St. John says, 'our fellowship may be with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ'

(verse 3)? Let us, then, be ever filled with sentiments of admiration and gratitude in presence of this mystery of Divine condescension. With what consolation and hope it should inspire us! We realize it more and more as we study our Divine Lord's life, words and actions, especially in the many works and discourses in which He displays the tenderness of His Sacred Heart. When we have weighed all these well, it comes upon us with less of a surprise that He should address Himself to us, and say, 'Come to Me.' We shall have learned how He yearned for us in all the tenderness of the compassion of the Good Samaritan, the Father of the prodigal son, and the Good Shepherd. He extends His arms to us, and He opens His Sacred Heart to us, and says: 'Come to Me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.' We will not keep away from Him; we dare not. For us, His invitation is a command. Go, then, to His Sacred Heart, burdened as you are with your imperfections, with your cares and sorrows, and with all the difficulties which beset you in the work of your salvation. The Sacred Heart will be to you a school of virtue and perfection, a place of refuge and consolation, and a bulwark of strength and support.

Every devout Christian experiences a trial to himself in his own spiritual infirmities. He knows that he should be humble, meek, charitable, unsensual and patient, but he sees himself far otherwise. He is not indifferent to this condition of infirmity which he discovers in himself, and which is the cause not only of many imperfections in his conduct,

but also of those sins which he has to expose for absolution in the sacred tribunal. You also experience some such trial; this is the first burden which you should carry to the Sacred Heart. But remark, the learner in a school of art has not only to correct the mistakes which he regrets to see in his work; he has, moreover, to study his model and conform his work to it. So should it be with you. It is not enough to lament over your spiritual infirmities and to repent of your falls; you must also look up to your Model, Jesus Christ, your Divine Lord, and by the study of His life and virtues, accompanied by earnest prayer, you must strive to imitate Him. This He invites you to do, saying: 'Learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart' (St. Matt. xi. 29); and then He goes on to assure you of the happy gain that will be yours, if you do thus strive to learn of Him, adding: 'You shall find rest to your souls.' Go, then, to the Sacred Heart as to a school of virtue and perfection, and continue to attend this school all your lives, because therein you will always have lessons to learn necessary for your correction, warning, encouragement, consolation and advancement. Do not weary of studying your Divine Master, and of listening to His teaching. Beg of Him to instruct you, as did Nicodemus, saying: 'We know that Thou art come a teacher from God' (St. John iii. 2); sit at His Sacred Feet, as did Mary, with the approval and commendation of our Lord, who said that she had chosen the best part, which should not be taken away from her (St. Luke x. 42).

You may wish to know in what way you are to carry out this advice. Let me say, in the first place, that you should do it by the practice of interior union with our Lord, by walking in His presence, and by frequent and fervent ejaculations addressed to Him. God said to Abraham: 'Walk before Me, and be perfect' (Gen. xvii. 1). Our Lord said to His Apostles: 'Abide in Me, and I in you' (St. John xv. 4). If you deem this practice difficult, let me yet exhort you to aspire to it. You may, however, go daily to the school of Christ, by careful and pious meditation on His life and virtues; and this the rule of your institute requires you to do. Study in your meditations not only the exterior acts of our Lord's life, but enter also into His Sacred Heart, to learn therein what His dispositions and virtues were, and what yours also should be. St. Paul says that in Him 'are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. ii. 3); the treasure-house is within, in His Sacred Heart, and there you must dive in to find them. Go, then, day by day to this school of virtue and perfection. There you will find the treasure of treasures, Divine charity; there you will become more and more conscious, but without discouragement of your faults and frailties; there you will study the consoling lessons of God's love, mercy, compassion and goodness; there you will learn to rise above the world and its paltry distinctions and empty pleasures; there you will be taught lessons of humility, charity, meekness, patience, submission, fervour, zeal, and every virtue and perfection; there you will be weaned from all

affection towards what is in any way evil, and you will be led to strive earnestly to correct your failings. Oh, place great value on your daily meditation! see if you cannot trace to some neglect or want of care, in making it, the many faults of which you are conscious, or the tepidity and indifference which may exist in your religious life and observance. Only be faithful in thus having recourse to the Sacred Heart, and you will store up lessons which will avail you for your guidance in all your difficulties, and for the correction of your failings. 'Come to Me,' our Lord deigns to say, 'all you who labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.'

You are not without your cares and sorrows, and these weigh upon you as a burden; they are a burden from which you will not be able to escape. What, then, must you do? You must only seek support under it, and that consolation which will make it lighter. Under your cares and sorrows run to the Sacred Heart, as to a place of refuge and consolation. Our Lord—all-unchangeable as He is—is no less tender and compassionate now than He was when the people of Galilee and Judea carried their sick to Him to be healed; and you have no less claim upon His Divine sympathy than they had. Isaias prophesied of Him: 'Surely He hath borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows' (liii. 4); He will be a refuge to His followers in their sorrows until the end of all time. Your cares and sorrows are a trial which He Himself sends you, or permits, in order to test your love, and afford you an opportunity

of merit; but He is ever at hand to support, and even to console, you under them. You are not so unspiritual or so immortified as to expect that He will at once brush away all your cares: He will always do what is for the best, but this would not be for the best. When trials of this kinds weigh upon you, you must carry your burden to the Sacred Heart, as to a place of refuge and consolation. They are intended to work great things in you for your sanctification; but you need the grace to act bravely, patiently, and religiously under them. If you are not supported by spiritual aid, they may weigh you down; they may come upon you and pass away, leaving you less perfect than they found you.

You may ask me how this advice should be followed. If you practise union with God, then heart will speak to heart; you will bear your trial in union with our Lord, and conform yourself to the Divine will in all its appointments; and God will bestow all the graces you need to bear you up under the trial. If you do not pretend to be adept in this holy practice, then you must have recourse to prayer; and in prayer also will heart speak to heart. Pray interiorly and pray vocally, from time to time, under the trial, thus leaning upon our Lord, and He will help you to support the burden. 'Come to Me,' He says in His tender invitation, 'and I will refresh you.' Pray to the Sacred Heart; hide your heart in it, as in a cleft of the rock (Cant. ii. 14), to seek there security from the storm. And while thus having recourse to our Lord, to beseech Him to

support you under your cares and sorrows, show your earnestness by greater zeal in correcting your faults, and in living up to religious observance. It is only becoming that, if you wish any favour at our Lord's hands, you should, on your part, strive to merit the favour by a special effort to please Him. How many there are who, in dealing with Him, wish to receive everything and to give nothing! This is not what a humble and earnest suppliant, without any merits, should do; he should make some effort to propitiate Him from whom he seeks a benefit. So do you add power to your prayer in the way which I have suggested; if you do so, your prayer will not only reach the door of the Sacred Heart, it will penetrate within it; it will move your Divine Saviour to listen to you, and to afford you that fortitude, patience, peace, and consolation, which your weary and tried spirit so sorely needs.

There is especially one place to which you should betake yourselves under severe trial, namely, to that sanctified spot where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. No royal banner floats over the palace of your King, no mounted guards or massive gates bar the way; a tiny lamp burns before the Presence, and approach is open to all. But it is the sanctuary of the King; Jesus is there under the humble veils of the Sacred Host. Before the Blessed Sacrament have knelt both Saints and sinners, drawn there by faith in the Real Presence, and by confidence in the hearing which Jesus would give to their prayers. Of the temple built by Solomon, Almighty God said: 'My eyes and My heart shall be there always'

(3 Kings ix. 3). The temples of the New Law are wonderfully multiplied, and in every one of them, where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, the eyes and heart of Jesus are present—His eyes to see you as you kneel before Him, and to see all your needs; His Sacred Heart to feel for you, and to grant your requests. Be faithful, then, in making your visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and when before the holy Tabernacle expose to the Sacred Heart of Jesus all your wants, your cares, and your sorrows. You will not speak in vain to that most tender Heart, for our Lord has said: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you' (St. Matt. vii. 7). How many have gone before the Tabernacle with a heavy heart, and have come away strengthened and consoled, and prepared to face with fresh energy and courage the difficulties of life! You may hope for a like experience if you seek there, with love and confidence, the help and consolation which you need.

You have one great work to accomplish, towards which all your other works should tend, and that all-important work is your salvation. This work is beset with difficulties, and, notwithstanding your good dispositions, it will not leave you free from all anxiety until it has been actually accomplished. You have spiritual enemies to contend with, both within and without, in every place and at every time; and this makes the real battle of life. The Sacred Heart will be to you a bulwark of strength and support, and you will be able to say with David: 'Thou art my refuge from the trouble which hath

encompassed me' (Psa. xxxi. 7). In a spiritual warfare you must use spiritual weapons, such as self-denial, prayer, and the holy Sacraments. Here I will speak of only one source of security, namely, Holy Communion, wherein is especially manifested the love of the Sacred Heart. In Baptism God gave you spiritual life, and clothed your soul with the garment of His children; in Confirmation He gave you growth and strength; in Penance He cleanses, or renews, the garment of grace; in Holy Communion He takes possession of the heart, to purify, sanctify, strengthen, and console it. In Holy Communion the Blessed Eucharist is to you the Bread of Life, the nourishment by which your soul is to be sustained and brought to eternal life; it is to you not only the means of attaining life everlasting, but also a Divine pledge assuring you of it, as conveyed in our Lord's words: 'He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day' (St. John vi. 55). Where, then, shall you seek with greater confidence than in Holy Communion, the strength and support which you need in working out your salvation? Herein our Lord does more than bring you under the shadow of His wings; He takes you up in the arms of His omnipotence, He presses you to His Sacred Heart, He gives Himself to you. With David, then, you may exclaim with sentiments of confidence and delight: 'Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me' (Psa. xxii. 4). Especially in this Sacrament is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias:

'Behold, God is my Saviour; I will deal confidently, and will not fear; because the Lord is my strength, and my praise, and He is become my salvation. You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains' (Isa. xii. 2, 3). You are no longer 'in a desert land, where there is no way and no water' (Psa. lxii. 3); Christ has made His Church the rich pasturage, as foretold by David, where he said: 'He hath set me in a place of pasture; He hath brought me up on the water of refreshment . . . He hath led me on the paths of justice' (Psa. xxii. 2, 3); and in the Holy Eucharist are realized these unspeakable benefits. What our Lord said to *Z*acheus, when He entered into his house and was becomingly received by him, He virtually says to you when you receive Him in Holy Communion: 'This day is salvation come to this house. . . . For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost' (St. Luke xix. 9, 10); for do you not remark how the burden of our Lord's references to this great Sacrament is a message of life and salvation? The same message is conveyed in the prophecies; thus, *Z*acharias says: 'What is the good thing of Him, and what is His beautiful thing, but the corn of the elect, and wine springing forth virgins?' (ix. 17). This is the message of the Sacred Heart to you in this Holy Sacrament: 'He that eateth this Bread shall live for ever' (St. John vi. 59). What difficulty in the way of salvation can you conceive, which may not be overcome by the sacramental grace of the Holy Eucharist? It is a remedy against the power of your passions; it overcomes tepidity; it shields

you against the darts of the Evil One. Only do your best to dispose your soul for the worthy reception of so great a Sacrament, and it will convey to your soul every grace which you need. But if you have not prepared yourselves well, and if after Holy Communion you do not feel any effects of the spiritual food of which you have partaken, then, St. Bonaventure says, 'it is a sign that your soul is either sick or dead. You have,' he says, 'put fire into your bosom, and you do not feel its heat; honey into your mouth, and you do not taste its sweetness.'

You do not merit this reproach, you who prepare yourselves so devoutly and receive Holy Communion with so much reverence and fervour. By every Communion, then, you make your salvation more secure; and the Divine Spouse of your souls will draw your affections more closely to Himself, and raise up a bulwark of protection between you and your spiritual enemies. See, then, what comfort you should derive from the love of the Sacred Heart displayed in this great Sacrament; how it should lessen your misgiving and soothe your anxiety about the accomplishment of your salvation! In this Sacrament, too, our Lord says to you: 'Come to Me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you'; through this Sacrament you are, as St. Paul says, 'rooted and built up in Him' (Col. ii. 7); herein His Sacred Heart is the ark of salvation, in which you may dwell securely and confidently.

Ponder, then, on what the Sacred Heart of Jesus is to you, that you may feel yourselves drawn closer to it; the more piously and faithfully you love and

worship it, the more abundant will be the fruits of sanctification which you will derive from it. Happy you, if you study its virtues and strive to imitate them. Happy you, if you have recourse to it in your cares and sorrows. Happy you, if you become united to it, and seek its help and protection through the life-giving Eucharist. The battle of life is still waging; it is not yet the time to repose in victory in that Divine Heart, which has been so true, so generous, so loving towards you. That Heart has laboured, so must you; that Heart has suffered, so must you; that Heart has glorified God, so must you. Reward and repose will come in their own time. In the meantime, consecrate yourselves to the Sacred Heart; put the Sacred Heart as a seal upon your heart: 'Put Me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm' (Cant. viii. 6); that is, let your affections and your works bear the seal of Divine charity: do not forget God's full claim to both. Thus shall you have your lamps burning, waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom.

SEVENTH DAY.

XX.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

'Casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you.'—1 St. Pet. v. 7.

If your previous meditations have convinced you of the holiness and blessedness of your calling, and of the necessity of fulfilling its obligations; and if your self-examination has shown you your shortcomings, and filled you with mistrust in yourselves on account of your weakness and fickleness—do not give way to discouragement.

On the one hand, it is true you must always, if you would be wise and stand firm, mistrust yourselves, knowing the feebleness and perversity of human nature; but, at the same time, you must always, on the other hand, have unbounded confidence in Almighty God, resting upon your lively faith in His infinite power, wisdom, goodness, love and compassion. 'We are not,' St. Paul tells us, 'sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God' (2 Cor. iii. 5). Much is indeed required of you as religious

consecrated to God; but you look for every grace from Him who can and will bestow upon you more than you ask at His hands, provided that you ask aright. Now, one of the dispositions necessary for the success of your pleading is confidence. Let me quote for you what St. James says on this point. 'If any of you,' he says, 'want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore, let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord' (i. 5-7). Even as children run to their father, as the poor seek relief from the rich, and as the weak cast themselves upon the protection of the strong, so must you have recourse, in all your difficulties and necessities, to God; but be sure to pray to Him with child-like trust and confidence.

I now invite you to consider some of the difficulties in which you must show your dependence upon God, and seek courage and strength from Him —difficulties in which you must display your unshaken confidence in Him.

Perhaps your first anxiety is about your sanctification, about your living as perfect a life as your state demands. This is a most reasonable anxiety; if you are actuated by it, it is certainly a sign that you realize your responsibility. Many virtues are expected in you, and a zeal for all that is good; a greater sanctity is expected in you than in seculars. See what means of grace, and therefore of sanctifi-

cation, are provided for you : the daily Mass, frequent Communion, weekly confession, meditation and prayer, the rosary, spiritual reading and examination of conscience. Then, there is also the care which your religious superiors have of your welfare, and the companionship and good example of sisters belonging to God, like yourselves, by a special title of consecration. You have also holy vows to keep, and religious rules to observe. All these are indeed means of sanctification ; but what if you do not avail yourselves of them, and if you do not correspond dutifully with the graces which they afford ? While on the one hand I point out your responsibility, let me hasten, on the other, to check undue anxiety, by telling you not to give way to discouragement. It is not, in the first place, pretended that you are under a strict obligation to perform all your actions in the most perfect manner, no matter how desirable it may be to do so. Then, in the second place, it is not pretended that you cease to fulfil your obligation to tend to perfection, if from one cause or another your progress is slow, or if you even make delay on the way, or if you do not turn all your opportunities to account ; although, undoubtedly, you should strive to make steady progress always, and to make the most of your opportunities. Lastly, let me say that, if you are not consciously and deliberately leading a careless and unfaithful religious life, you should not allow occasional infidelities and venial faults to discourage you or destroy your peace of mind, as such short-comings are likely to occur under the present conditions of our existence. What is needed

is to repent speedily of them, and to try to avoid a recurrence of them.

In thus saying that you are not under an obligation of doing your utmost; that, while still tending to perfection, you may sometimes find yourselves dallying on the way of perfection, and that at times you may discover yourselves guilty of venial infidelities, I am making a concession to human frailty which it is necessary to make;* but I am supposing that you still esteem your vocation, and that you are anxious to fulfil its obligations. I trust, however, that these considerations, which are just, may be a help to you to allay unnecessary alarm and misgiving; they are not intended to give sanction to carelessness, indifference or sloth, or to afford shelter to any erroneous notions of the obligations of the religious state. You know well that your strenuous and continuous efforts should be directed, not to pulling down the edifice of your sanctification, but to building it up.

And now let me put before you a consideration which should fill you with confidence when anxiety arises as to your corresponding with your vocation. You recognise the holiness of your vocation, and at the same time your own imperfections and weakness. But who has called you to the religious life? And who, therefore, has imposed upon you the obligations belonging to your holy calling? Is it not God Himself who has done so? 'I have chosen you.' He, then, will bestow abundantly upon you all the

* Some of the works even of the just may be faulty. See 1 Cor. iii. 12.

graces which you need to enable you to correspond with your vocation, and to fulfil faithfully the duties of your state. This cannot be called into doubt. You have, indeed, practical proof of it in the devout lives of so many religious.

If, therefore, there are religious who have fallen from their first fervour, religious who are indevout and disedifying, it is not that anything has been wanting upon God's part, but the fault is entirely their own.

Let me say, however, that even if any of you have been at fault, you may repair it. If a religious has not been living up to the perfection of her calling, she must not despair of doing better. Ah no! She should frankly acknowledge her culpability; she should sincerely repent of her negligence, and grieve for having perhaps brought reproach upon religion by her conduct. She should look upon the occasion of this retreat as an invitation from our Lord to return to her former fervour in His service. When our Lord, upon the death of Lazarus, drew near to Bethania, Martha hurried to meet Him—this is the picture of the fervent religious. But see her zeal and discretion; Mary had stayed at home, a picture of the religious held back by imperfections. Martha, the Gospel tells us, 'went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. She, as soon as she heard this, riseth quickly and cometh to Him' (St. John xi. 28, 29). This is what the imperfect religious must do. The preacher performs the part of Martha in conveying our Lord's message: 'He is come, and He calls for you. Arise quickly and go to Him.'

Renew, then, your confidence in God, who will bestow His grace freely in response to your prayer, and bring you back to fervour and sustain you in it — provided that you co-operate with His all-necessary grace. 'Nothing,' says St. Paul, 'is wanting to you in any grace' (1 Cor. i. 7).

Another anxiety which may weigh upon you is your duty to others. Some members of the community are occupied in labouring for others. This may be called their special work in the Church. Among the ornaments of the Church are the grand spiritual and corporal works of mercy to which so may religious devote themselves, and in which they spend themselves, their resources, their time, their lives. The misgivings which, in your case, may arise as to such duties, proceed from uncertainty as to the purity of the motives by which you are actuated, and from neglect or indifference in fulfilling your charge. You recognise that any faultiness or neglect is likely to affect, not only yourselves, but also those who are the objects of your care and devotedness. You know what self-denial, patience, charity, discretion, and other virtues, you need in the discharge of these duties. Undoubtedly you require special help from God. Be not discouraged, but renew your confidence in God, who will bestow this special help. Those for whom you labour belong by a first title to Him, and it is, moreover, for God's sake that you devote yourselves to the labour. You may then say that the work is doubly God's, and be therefore sure that He will supply all the graces and helps which you need in its accomplishment. Do not,

however, cease to beg God's blessing upon it, that it may be for His glory; consecrate your devotedness to Him, that it may be successful and meritorious. 'Cast thy care upon the Lord,' says the royal prophet, 'and He shall sustain thee' (Psa. liv. 23).

A third source of anxiety arises from the warfare of life; you have to do battle with the devil, the world, and the flesh. It is not only seculars who have to contend with these dangerous and persistent enemies, but religious also are exposed to their snares and their assaults. It is even possible that these foes of the Christian may reserve their deadliest venom and most persevering efforts for the chosen souls whom God, by a special vocation, calls away from the ordinary paths of life.

When Satan lays his secret snares, or when he leads you all unawares into some strong temptation; when he renews the assault with redoubled vigour; and even if he should come back with seven other spirits more malignant than himself, be not dismayed. Pray, cease not to pray; the Divine Spouse of your souls will protect and help you. 'Put you on,' says St. Paul, 'the armour of God'—the armour of God!—'that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil' (Eph. vi. 11). St. Paul repeats the advice, to invite you to courage and confidence, and to show that, God helping you, you will not be overcome by the temptation. 'Therefore,' he says, 'take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect' (vi. 13). You may

even venture to believe that God will give a religious very special aids, that she may not succumb to the temptation. When the tempest has reached its height, our Lord will, as it were, command the winds and the waves raised against her by the temptation, and say, 'Peace, be still'; and there shall come a great calm. These assaults of Satan are a great interior trial: sometimes they come as violent movements to anger, dislike, bitterness or resentment; sometimes as discontent, discouragement, disgust with your vocation, or despondency; sometimes as doubts against faith, or mistrust of God and His providence; and at other times as frightful and unaccountable imaginations and pictures, or as sudden promptings to evil. Be not disconcerted; it is not you who have caused them, and you are not responsible for them; but you must struggle against them. If you pray, and do battle valiantly against them, you will gain great merit. Be not disconcerted, again I say; for you know that God has so ordained your temptations that none shall be what it is beyond your strength to resist and overcome. 'God is faithful,' St. Paul says, 'who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it' (1 Cor. x. 13). Do battle, then, confidently with the enemy, mistrusting indeed your own strength, but placing unlimited trust in the power and goodness of God to shield and save you.

The second enemy is the world, that world which perhaps you are so willing to please, but which all

the time is trying to lead you from God. By 'the world' no one means the pious people who esteem and respect religious because they are religious, and who like to see them all that they should be in piety and conduct; but I mean every class of persons who, whether wittingly or unwittingly, whether for aims of their own or through misguided friendship, would lead a religious to neglect her duties, to enter into intrigues, or to fall into unreligious conduct, or who would draw to themselves a particular affection and attachment. By 'the world' I mean persons who would lead a religious to a distaste for her vocation, to a disregard of her rules, observances and obligations, and to breaches of her vows of poverty and obedience.

I need not go further in describing what is meant by the world; it could easily be painted in more terrifying colours. There lie beyond the limits of my description more appalling dangers and deeper precipices; there are the ways of scandal and apostasy, which lead to the abyss.

But with regard to that other world which seems less objectionable, do not deceive yourselves; it is a world which can and will cause you to fall from your fervour; it will lead you to infidelity to your rule, to dissipation of mind, and to many venial sins —I will not say to mortal sin, although that, too, is possible; for you know that the holier your calling is, so much the greater should be your care to protect and foster your grace; and if you do expose yourselves to a fall, the fall may be very great. 'Go

not,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'in the way of ruin, and thou shalt not stumble against the stones; trust not thyself to a rugged way, lest thou set a stumbling-block to thy soul' (xxxii. 25). What, therefore, you must do is to keep away from all danger when once you perceive any; yet, if there be danger in the necessary fulfilment of any of your duties, you must be filled with confidence that God will most surely protect you. No matter what snares the world may then lay for you, you will be shielded by the Divine guardianship. 'In the world,' said our Blessed Lord to His disciples, 'you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world' (St. John xvi. 33).

The third enemy is the domestic enemy of your own passions of every kind, an enemy which not only may rise against you because of its own proclivities, but which may also be incited to rebellion by the instigation of your other enemies, the devil and the world. Therefore is it held to be man's most dangerous foe. Why has it been able to count so many victories gained over you? You have been at fault, because you did not watch and pray; you were taken unawares, or you were deluded; the malice was cloaked until you had fallen; you saw it, perhaps, but you did not realize it. What is usually the case? Is it not this? When you are composed and fervent, you see the deformity and the evil of anger, pride, concupiscence, intemperance, envy, jealousy, and every other unruly passion; and you recognise the terrible consequences which they may bring upon your soul, upon your life, and upon

your future; but when temptation occurs—if you do not spurn it and pray against it on the instant—the vision of the truth becomes dim as the mists of passion rise, and presently you find yourselves vanquished. But all this need not have been in the past, and need not be again. What is termed in Nature the 'old man' may yet cling to you; but it will only be to afford you more abundant merit and a more glorious victory. Our Lord said to St. Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for you.' Count upon the same consoling assurance. St. Paul, full of confidence, exclaimed: 'I can do all things in Him that strengthens me.' Do not lose heart: God will help you in all your contests with unruly passions. If you employ the necessary precautions, if you avoid known danger, if you ask for God's help, God will not permit you to be overcome, but will give you victory over them. In this matter, too, be ever animated by unbounded confidence in the love, goodness and compassion of God, that He will always hear you, and help and sustain you: 'casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you.'

Lastly, I invite and exhort you to look confidently to God in the trials which will beset you on your way through life. These trials are sometimes, and perhaps most often, interior, and sometimes their cause is exterior. For the most part, as though by a special arrangement of a tender Providence, they are not of long duration; but one trial succeeds another, and so it will be till the end. As long as you continue to be followers of Christ crucified, you

must expect to experience something of the suffering and ignominy of the Passion. The measure of it will be according to your grace. With St. Paul how great was the measure! 'Our flesh,' he wrote, 'had no rest, but we suffered all tribulation; combats without, fears within' (2 Cor. vii. 5). But how little you are asked to endure! There is, however, the constant drain and strain upon your forces in fulfilling your duties; there are your own trying faults of character; there is, perhaps, a disagreeable mannerism in some of your sisters; there are bodily ailments and loss of spirits; there are various annoyances, interruptions and contradictions; there are doubts, misgivings and difficulties; there is fatigue, and sometimes there is pressure of work. All these things tell upon you, and become the little trials of which your life is made up. Alas, how little patience you have! How often, instead of being glad to have something to bear for God's sake, you have lost the merit of your suffering or inconvenience, by petulance, murmuring and discontent! This was decidedly faulty. Have confidence in the wisdom and goodness of God, who sends you these little trials for your good; embrace willingly and readily the whole will of God in your regard, and trust yourselves entirely and submissively to His good pleasure.

It behoves you, then, in the work of your sanctification, in the duties of your vocation, in your struggle against the devil, the world and the flesh, and in the cares and trials of life, to possess your souls in patience; to renew your faith in the loving

providence and protection of God ; and to reanimate yourselves with unbounded confidence in His help. 'To them that love God,' St. Paul assures us, 'all things work together unto good' (Rom. viii. 28).

I will not stay to dwell at any length upon the lessons of confidence which our Lord sought to impress upon His disciples. Call to mind His discourse about the lilies of the field, His rebuke when the Apostles lost heart in the storm, and the reassurance which He would have them experience at His presence: 'It is I, fear not.' You, too, are His, you have consecrated your lives to Him ; you are working for Him. He will know how to have a care of His own. If He were to deign to come among you now, He would still invite you to confidence. You are gathered together here in His name, to seek His grace, to rest your weary souls, to imbibe fresh strength, to prepare yourselves to labour anew for Him, to give your steps a firmer tread and a more perfect direction ; you who are His sworn friends, His spouses ; you who have already laboured much for Him, and perhaps sacrificed much for Him ; and do you for a moment think that He will leave you to tread the weary way alone and unheeded, or that He will let your souls famish by the way? Oh no! Our Lord will not deal with you in this manner: He will aid and sustain you. Have confidence!

Then look also with confidence towards your heavenly Mother. If she does not abandon the ordinary Christian wayfarer, but pleads unceasingly for all who invoke her patronage, what may you

not hope that she will do for you, who are consecrated to her Divine Son, and who belong also to her by a special title. Be sure that she will ever watch over you, and aid you by her all-powerful intercession. Count also in your labours, difficulties, temptations and sorrows, upon the protection and prayers of your Guardian Angels and holy patrons; they too will help you. Pilgrims of earth as you are, these citizens of the kingdom of heaven will watch over you and pray for you.

And now, in conclusion, let me say, take comfort from the thought that, as religious, you are the special objects of God's love. No matter how great your labour, no matter how weighty your responsibility, no matter how strong the temptation which assails you, no matter how severe the trial which overtakes you, trust in God and in His love for you: 'casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you.' Let this confidence sustain you during the whole course of your lives, and may it fill you with the hope that God will crown all His other graces with the indispensable gift of final perseverance. 'It is good for me,' said David, 'to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God: that I may declare all Thy praises, in the gates of the daughter of Sion' (Psa. lxxii. 28).

XXI.

RECOMPENSE.

'Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'—APOC. xix. 9.

LONG and dreary to the devout Christian seems the way of this life, with its labours, cares and sorrows. This desert of his earthly pilgrimage has no greater charms for him as he advances further into it. The satisfaction, whether of riches or pleasures, offered him by the world is empty, unreal, unsatiating, superficial and fleeting; he seeks it not, but fixes his gaze on the horizon of life. Welcome to him would be the sight of the promised land, he yearns for the vision of God. Yet a little while longer, and his desires shall be realized; as Isaias says: 'He shall dwell on high . . . His eyes shall see the King in His beauty' (xxxiii. 16, 17). Not that the devout Christian is sad while awaiting the realization of his hopes, for he conforms himself to the Divine will, seeking ever to please God, and thus to add to his merits: you see him, therefore, patient, even-minded, joyous, thankful, although under his afflictions and disappointments he may exclaim with David, 'Woe is me, that my sojourning is prolonged'

(Psa. cxix. 5), and under his temptations with St. Paul, 'Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' (Rom. vii. 24). But the reward will come at last.

Let me put before you some thoughts about the recompense which God has in reserve for you, and for all who die in the state of grace. The subject is one to inspire you with thankfulness and love, with fervour and generosity.

When our Lord, with every manifestation of deep feeling, brought Lazarus back to life, the witnesses said: 'Behold, how He loved him!' How short and laborious, however, that life was which was renewed in Lazarus! What shall we say when we contemplate the everlasting life of happiness and glory to which our Lord invites us? when we consider, moreover, at what a cost our Lord has merited for us so great a beatitude as that which He has prepared for us? Should we not be overwhelmed with sentiments of thankfulness, seeing what infinite love is displayed in this dispensation of His providence? We may say, 'Behold, how He has loved us!' He has assumed our nature, He has bound it by an everlasting bond to His Divine nature, so that by this hypostatic union He will ever be both God and man; He has enriched us with Divine grace, uniting us to His mystical body; He gives Himself sacramentally to us in the Blessed Eucharist: is not this enough? Will He not tire of us, all unworthy, lowly and miserable as we are? No, He will yet bring us to His heavenly kingdom, to bestow upon us yet greater favours, and to have us with Himself

for all eternity. Our earthly existence is to be followed by everlasting felicity in the possession and enjoyment of God. As we cannot comprehend God, we cannot comprehend how great is the happiness of possessing and enjoying Him. 'I am thy reward exceeding great' (Gen. xv. 1), this was God's assurance given to Abraham. 'Be glad and rejoice,' our Lord said, 'for your reward is very great in heaven' (St. Matt. v. 12). St. Paul, quoting the prophet Isaias, describes in these words this unspeakable recompense: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him' (1 Cor. ii. 9). Is it surprising that to secure this happiness, which God bestows as a reward which must be merited, martyrs have undergone such tortures, confessors have undertaken such labours, monks and hermits have quitted their homes, virgins have consecrated themselves to God, and men and women in every age have been heroic in their charity and self-sacrifice?

What a contrast between our present existence and our future existence in heaven! The sufferings of humanity point to a great evil which has been committed; they are an evidence of the existence of sin, and, united to the merits of Christ crucified, they are a continual atonement to God for sin. In our present existence we all suffer, and to our sufferings are joined many human miseries; we are weak, inconstant, passionate; right reason meets constantly with opposition on the part of both our interior and exterior faculties; we are ignorant and

easily deluded; we are exposed to diseases, calamities, misfortunes, sorrows and death. On earth we find no remedy for all our miseries, no protection against misfortune, no security against death; on earth we experience no perfect rest and no full contentment. Our existence on earth is our time of trial and merit, it is not a stable or enduring existence; as St. Paul says: 'We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come' (Heb. xiii. 14).

Let me now invite you to consider the conditions of our future existence in heaven, that you may contrast it with our present existence, which I have thus briefly depicted. In heaven we shall be free from every evil, and blessed with every good. If, then, we have sorrow here below, it shall be changed into joy, and our joy no man shall take from us (St. John xvi. 22). There is a contrast as between riches and poverty, plenty and want, joy and sorrow, happiness and misery, peace and war, life and death, eternity and time.

The first striking feature of our heavenly reward is the entire absence of every evil or misery. Accustomed as we are to every variety of suffering and annoyance, we cannot well conceive what it will be to be entirely and for ever free from everything of the kind. We read in the Apocalypse: 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away' (xxi. 4). Try to realize how happy God's elect shall be when free from pain, anxiety, sorrow, doubt, uneasiness, persecution, annoyance, temptation, mis-

giving, disappointment, envy, weariness, vice, passion, danger, fear, solicitude, heat, cold, disease and death. This universal relief in itself is a boon we shall treasure exceedingly, but what is it in comparison with the beatitude which shall be added to it?

The essence of the happiness of the Saints is the beatific vision. By the light of glory, bestowed upon them by God, they see God as He is, they see the ever-adorable Trinity. All see Him, but some more perfectly than others, each one according to his merit. Thus is realized in their regard our Lord's promise, when He said: 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God' (St. Matt. v. 8). St. Paul teaches us the difference between our vision of God in this world by faith, and the beatific vision of Him in heaven, when he says: 'We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known' (1 Cor. xiii. 12). St. John gives us the same assurance when he says, 'We shall see Him as He is' (1 St. John iii. 2). We cannot form the least idea either of what we shall thus see in the light of glory, or of the unspeakable happiness with which we shall be ravished, enjoying throughout eternity this vision of God. This is the great good for which our soul longs, and which alone can fully satiate its desires. Just as the loss of the only and sovereign and Supreme Good constitutes the greatest punishment of the reprobate, so does the possession of it constitute the essential reward of the blessed.

We shall see the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, in His sacred humanity—Jesus Christ, our loving Saviour. Our happiness in seeing Him, and being with Him in heaven, will far exceed that which the Apostles experienced in His company while with Him on earth. We remember how St. Peter, at the Transfiguration on Thabor, wished to erect there a tabernacle for Him ; and being ravished by the sight of our Lord in that passing vision of His beauty, how he exclaimed : 'Lord, it is good for us to be here' (St. Matt. xvii. 4). But our Lord had not then entered into His glory; He had not yet accomplished the sacrifice, and achieved His final triumph, and taken possession of His kingdom with all His elect, as recorded in prophecy : 'With Thee is the principality in the day of Thy strength, in the brightness of the Saints (Psa. cix. 3). How inexpressible our joy will be to dwell in the everlasting tabernacles with our Lord, to praise Him for all His love and goodness, and to experience according to the measure of our capacity the tenderness of His Sacred Heart!

Another reward in heaven will be the blessedness of the companionship of all the Angels and Saints. There shall we behold our heavenly Queen and Mother, in all her glory and beauty. Our eyes long for that sight, and we wish to realize, as we should, the fulness of our relationship with her : this relationship, with all its joys, will be realized only in heaven. There we shall bless her for all her care of us during our pilgrimage on earth ; there we shall pay her the tribute of praise which becomes her as the Mother

of God and Queen of heaven; there her love and her companionship will be to us a source of ineffable beatitude. How enraptured, too, we shall be to find ourselves for ever associated with the millions of Angels and Saints in a love and felicity without alloy, of which no delight of earth can furnish an idea. Among them we shall recognise our Guardian Angel, St. Joseph, our holy patrons, and all those who were dear to us on earth and are numbered with the blessed. We shall be gathered with these and the countless multitude of the heavenly host before the throne of the Lamb, to celebrate unceasingly the nuptials of the Lamb, with unspeakable bliss and rejoicings. 'Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'

Let us now dwell upon some features of this heavenly beatitude. It will be a state of glory and honour. David proclaims God's goodness to man where he says, 'Thou hast made him a little less than the Angels, Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour' (Psa. viii. 6). Our present grace is the seed of glory: grace is the garment of the soul in this world; glory will be the garment of both body and soul in heaven. In that heavenly kingdom we shall appear in that condition which becomes us as its citizens, and as children of God. In the Book of Wisdom, speaking of the reward of the just, it is said: 'Therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory, and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord' (v. 17). St. Paul tells us of 'the glory to come which shall be revealed in us' (Rom. viii. 18). What the endowments of a glorified being

are it is not given to us to know; but just as heaven itself is beyond everything we can imagine, so must we say that the glorious condition of the blessed is beyond all thought or comprehension. Our Lord said: 'Then shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father' (St. Matt. xiii. 43).

Our Lord tells us that our reward in heaven is 'very great' (St. Matt. v. 12). Now, although, being the happiness of creatures, it is not beyond all measure, it is yet beyond all measure which we, in this world, can ascribe to it; it will be apportioned to each according to the degree of charity and merit in which he died. That degree will fix the capacity of glory and happiness of each one of the elect, and the extent of his fruition of God. Our Lord said to His Apostles: 'In My Father's house there are many mansions' (St. John xiv. 2); and St. Paul says, 'Star differeth from star in glory' (1 Cor. xv. 41). Each one of the blessed shall be satiated to the full measure of his degree, and will therefore be supremely content with his happy lot; although he may see others among the Saints partaking of a larger fruition of the heavenly delights. 'They shall be inebriated,' says holy David, 'with the plenty of Thy house, and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure' (Psa. xxxv. 9). This revelation expresses but feebly the real magnificence and measure of the heavenly happiness.

The just man relishes God to some extent in this life; therefore does David say: 'O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet' (Psa. xxxiii. 9); 'O how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which

Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee' (Psa. xxx. 20). Among the fruits of goodness and virtue resulting from grace which the just man experiences, are a certain sweetness and delight which give him a relish for what is good. But how compare these feelings with the sweetness and delight which will result from the fruition of the Sovereign Good! 'Thou shalt fill me with joy with Thy countenance,' said David; 'at Thy right hand are delights, even to the end' (Psa. xv. 11). In heaven God will be tasted, not only in His gifts and favours, but also in Himself—thus ravishing the blessed with unspeakable joy, sweetness, and delight.

The eternity of heaven conveys the idea of repose, peace, life. In our present unstable condition of existence we cannot find true rest or absolute peace; and life which is of short duration, and which is ever exposed, as our present life is, to risks and dangers, does not merit the name. Our Lord has said: 'They that have done good things shall come forth unto the resurrection of life' (St. John v. 29); and this life shall be everlasting (St. John vi. 55). All that glory and happiness which we have seen shall be the portion of the blessed, shall be theirs for ever; how this condition of our reward enhances inexpressibly and immeasurably its value! St. Paul says: 'That which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory' (2 Cor. iv. 17). St. Peter tells us that this happy inheritance reserved for us in heaven is one that is 'incorruptible, undefiled, and that cannot fade'

(1 St. Peter i. 4); and speaking especially of the reward of good pastors, he says, they 'shall receive a never-fading crown of glory' (v. 4). In heaven we shall continue in our blessedness as long as God shall be God. This is the belief which we profess every time we say the Apostles' Creed, which ends with the doctrine of 'life everlasting.'

With only these few considerations before us of the conditions and features of the future recompense, are we not struck very forcibly by the contrast between our present existence here on earth and the future existence in heaven which we hope for? On earth, that which is of earth cannot satisfy us, and we see God, as it were, only in a dark manner and by reflection, by faith; in heaven we shall see Him as He is. On earth we are associated with men doomed to the same experience of human miseries as ourselves, and with the scandalous and wicked, as well as with the good and imperfect; in heaven we shall be associated with Angels and Saints. On earth whatever satisfaction we may experience is insignificant; in heaven our satisfaction and enjoyment will be full, all our desires shall be realized. On earth we meet with trials and miseries of every kind; in heaven we shall be in a place of happiness and unspeakable delights. On earth our pilgrimage is short and uncertain; in heaven our life will be without end.

And now, consider the contrast between the labour on earth and the recompense in heaven; or rather, keeping in mind the greatness of the happiness of heaven and the untold magnificence of the reward,

see by what scanty effort, comparatively speaking, we may attain this surpassing recompense. Herein is seen a striking proof of God's infinite love and bounty.

God adopts us as sons and heirs; and just as a son and heir, as such, inherits his father's property, without any great labour, provided only that he proves himself dutiful, so also does God deal with us, asking only that we should be dutiful. But, as we have been the children of wrath by sin, we must bear in ourselves some little of the punishment of sin. St. Paul says: 'We are the sons of God; and if sons, heirs also; heirs, indeed, of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; yet so, if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him.' Then he goes on to consider the contrast between the suffering or labour on the one side, and the immense recompense on the other; and he says: 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us' (Rom. viii. 16-18). Our labour is short, and it is accompanied by many satisfactions—such as they are—suitable to our present condition; our sufferings are light, and they are alleviated by many consolations; so that the devout Christian recognises the truth of our Lord's words: 'My yoke is sweet, and My burden light' (St. Matt. xi. 30). The words of St. Peter Alcantara do not therefore surprise us. This great Saint, of austere life, appeared to St. Teresa after death, and exclaimed: 'O happy penance, which has merited for me so great a reward!' Only read over the eight beatitudes,

and see what is required on the one hand, and what reward is bestowed on the other. We stand in astonishment and admiration at God's unspeakable bountifulness. Our Lord expressed it at one time in these words: 'Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together and running over, shall they give into your bosom' (St. Luke vi. 38).

While comforting yourselves with the thought of this most glorious and eternal recompense, ask yourselves how you are to merit it, and what efforts you will make to obtain it. 'Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle? or who shall rest in Thy holy hill?' This is David's question. He answers it thus: 'He that walketh without blemish, and worketh justice' (Psa. xiv. 1, 2). The happiness of heaven is the reward of virtue, of fidelity to one's vocation, of labour for God, and of carrying the cross. You are, happily, walking in the path that leads to this everlasting tabernacle and to this holy hill. I have only to invite you to persevere in the strait way that leads to life (St. Matt. vii. 14), and to encourage you to walk in it with a firm step. Perhaps at one time or another of your life you have faltered or stumbled on the way; this must not now dishearten you, but only make you more resolute for the future. Who so desirous of your salvation as that loving Lord who paid the price of it, and who awaits you to bestow upon you the crown of life, purchased by His own Precious Blood? Has He not called you to religion as to a place of security against all danger as regards your salvation? Has He not made special

promises to you, saying, 'Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother . . . for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting' (St. Matt. xix. 29)? In response to God's gracious call, you have left all things; you have taken Him as your portion; you may exclaim with David: 'What have I in heaven, and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?' (Psa. lxxii. 25). If there are any on earth who ought (as all good Christians should do) to look up with a firm hope to heaven, it is religious who should do so.

Be not disheartened or faint-hearted in your religious lives, no matter what obstacles, labour, sufferings and temptations you may meet with. When weariness comes upon you, when you feel unequal to your cares and trials, when temptation assails you, think of God and His heavenly kingdom; think of the reward awaiting you, think you hear your Guardian Angel encouraging you and saying to you: 'Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown' (Apoc. iii. 11). The reward that is reserved for you is of more value than all the labours you undergo, than all the struggles you make in the contest, than all the self-denial you practise, than all the pains, opposition and persecution you suffer. You will never have to regret anything which you have done or suffered to acquire it.

Look, then, up to heaven as to your everlasting home and place of rest. There is every good which you can desire, there the realization of all

your pious hopes, there the treasure which you long to possess. Our Lord has said: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (St. Luke xii. 34). Do not, then, attach yourselves inordinately to anything on earth; everything here below is insignificant in comparison with heavenly joys and riches. How soon you and all of us shall have passed away from this land of our exile! St. Paul says: 'The time is short; it remaineth that . . . they that weep be as if they wept not, and they that rejoice as if they rejoiced not . . . and they that use this world as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away' (1 Cor. vii. 29-31). But leave nothing undone which is necessary to secure the heavenly reward, and, as St. Peter says, 'labour the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election' (2 St. Pet. i. 10). The heavenly promises are in your favour, the inheritance is before you, Divine grace will aid you, Mary and all the Angels and Saints will pray for you. Be glad, then, and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. 'Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.'

XXII.

LOVE OF GOD.

'I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?'—ST. LUKE xii. 49.

OUR Lord's mission, described in these words, has ever been going on; it lies in the power of all His followers to promote it. God wills that all hearts should be caught up by the flames of Divine charity. It should, therefore, burn in your hearts, and you should spread around you the light and warmth of this heavenly fire. But how great is the price which you should set upon it! for charity is the key of salvation. You may have faith and hope; but these will not, without charity, give you a claim to eternal life. Great as is the evil of mortal sin, it does not necessarily destroy faith and hope; but it deprives you of the exquisite grace of that charity which unites you to God: this it is which chiefly manifests how terrible and calamitous the evil of mortal sin is. As to death—which is so much dreaded—while in the predestined it changes faith into vision, and hope into realization, it brings charity to its perfection, which is union with and possession of its object, its object being no other than God

Himself. This is the treasure, to possess which we should part with everything else. Therefore St. Paul says: 'If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver up my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing' (1 Cor. xiii. 3). To this eminent virtue did he cling so perseveringly that he was able to say to the Romans: 'I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor Angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God' (viii. 38, 39). Such an example and such assurance should inflame you with a like determination, and should lead you to set the same value as he did upon this indispensable virtue. I do not, indeed, pretend that the love of God does not burn in your hearts and manifest itself in your lives; but who among you is there so bold as to say that she loves God as much as she ought? and who is there so callous as not to wish to love Him more than she now loves Him? This Divine charity is a virtue which must be cultivated, a sacred passion which should stimulate you with ever-increasing force, and a spiritual flame which should be fanned into a greater fire by pious desires and more fervent and generous action. 'I came,' said our Lord, 'to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?'

What, forsooth, shall raise you from the spiritual lethargy into which you have perhaps fallen? What shall draw you out of a condition of torpidity, of un-

reality, or of want of energy in your religious life? What shall make you keenly alive to the evil of deliberate sin, even if only venial? What shall inspire you with effective earnestness in correcting your faults and imperfections? What shall make you now take up again those religious exercises which you have neglected altogether, and fulfil with care and fidelity such as you have been remiss about? What shall make you appreciate the true value of your holy vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and make you determined to observe them most exactly and meritoriously? What shall instigate you to that devotedness and generosity which your holy calling and its duties and works demand of you? Then, finally, I ask: what shall prevent your wasting the grace of this retreat, and what shall stimulate you to persevere?

There is, in my mind, only one answer to all these questions: I know of only one thing which can accomplish all these desirable effects. What is this one thing? Is it a sense of duty? No; such a sense is liable to fluctuation. Is it fear of punishment and spiritual loss? No; I could not even say, with certainty, that the fear of hell would continue to keep you fervent, although, undoubtedly, it ought to do so, and I should certainly hope that it would. Is it the desire of present and future reward? No; heaven is always before you, yet you fail in many things. There is just one thing which can produce all these desirable results: this one thing is the love of God—the love of God become a real living flame within your hearts.

That is true which is commonly said : love can work wonders.

You are closing this retreat with the general determination of avoiding evil and doing good. You have seen the obstacles to your religious perfection ; you have repented of your faults and shortcomings—in other words, of your sins of commission and omission ; these you are determined to avoid. You have also considered what your religious obligations are, and what your conduct should be, both as to your interior life and as to your religious or community life and its duties ; and you have formed your good resolutions accordingly. We may in this way sum up the work of the retreat.

And now you must look for the means of carrying into effect what you have so fervently and generously purposed to do. You may gather from what I have already said, what the means are which I am going to suggest, namely, charity. You must pray that Divine charity may be increased in your souls ; you must cultivate it by your co-operation and fidelity. Even were the task before you twice as difficult as it really is, charity would sustain you, and enable you to accomplish it. I am not, however, pretending that you can be fervent religious without a spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice. But see the inestimable value of Divine charity : for it is only charity which can beget this meritorious spirit ; it buds forth from charity, as the beautiful blossom comes forth from the vigorous plant. Moreover, this spirit is one of the healthy

manifestations of your charity; charity, we know, seeks for ways of showing itself.

When you weigh your obligations, and consider the continual call which there is upon your devotedness, you become convinced that no fickle, half-hearted, or callous effort will sustain you, and enable you to do well and faithfully all that is required of you. Though you are not obliged to be heroic, your duties yet demand that you should be generous. May I not surmise that if your self-examination has convinced you of your having failed in various ways in your religious duties, and in the spirit of your service of your Divine Lord, it has been chiefly owing to a lack of generosity? Where shall we find a religious dutiful and fervent, who is not generous? Seek, then, for this desirable spirit of generosity: Divine charity will beget it. Take one more view of charity, which is this: charity is the only guarantee of your continued fidelity, of your perseverance. We read in the Canticle of Canticles (viii. 6, 7): 'Love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench charity.' No; the flame is too strong and persistent. 'Charity,' St. Paul says, 'never falleth away.' And St. John supplies the reason of this, where he says: 'He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him' (1 St. John iv. 16). Truly, then, charity is a treasure, to possess which you should be ready to part with everything else; it is a gift of God which should be the object of your constant prayer.

The Divine Spouse of your souls, to whom and to whose service you have consecrated yourselves,

wishes you to be united to Him by a special and abiding bond of love. 'Abide,' He says, 'in My love.' He insists upon your abiding in Him; He even threatens you with fatal consequences if you fail to abide in Him; in other words, you have to cling to His grace, and to adopt all the means necessary to protect it and increase it. This is His desire. Do you, according to your opportunities, strive to inculcate this love of our Lord in the hearts of others?—be not less zealous in nourishing it in your own hearts. How precious in the sight of God is the heart of a fervent, God-loving religious! What deep and consoling meaning our Lord's words contain for her: 'He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father; and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him' (St. John xiv. 21). 'If anyone love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him' (xiv. 23). How thankful you should be for these Divine words! What a consoling assurance they imply and convey of the support of grace in all your needs, and of your perseverance in grace!

Oh that we could understand the true value of Divine charity! It is that pure spring from which issues the water of which our Lord said to the Samaritan woman: 'He that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst for ever. But the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting' (St. John iv. 13, 14). Charity is that precious gift which alone can attract the Divine complacency;

knowledge, accomplishments, talents, courage, and every other gift, natural or supernatural, without charity, would fail to attract it. It is charity which gives value in God's eyes to our actions, even to the least; it, as it were, turns everything it touches into gold. It bears unlimited development; it communicates its heat around.

What wonders pious religious can do by their edifying words and example! how beneficially for themselves children and others are drawn towards them and fall under their influence; when they teach, when they give advice, when they attend the sick, how much good they are able to accomplish! They are as the wise virgins, who had plenty of oil in their lamps, and who were ready when the bridegroom came. Fill, then, your lamps with the oil of charity; charity will perfect and maintain your virtue, and enable you to spread around you the good odour of Christ, your heavenly Spouse; and even when you have passed away, the fruits of your good works and good example will remain.

Divine charity, again, will sweeten your labour, and yield you consolation in times of trial. What an encouragement it affords you, when the work is arduous, to be able to say to yourselves, 'I am doing this for God,' and under the sufferings and various trials of life to be able to say, 'I willingly bear everything for God's sake'! This is practical charity.

Lastly, charity deprives even death of its terrors. We read that when Samuel was about to visit Agag with the punishment of his heartless cruelties, the wretched man exclaimed: 'Doth bitter death sepa-

rate in this manner?' (1 Kings xv. 32). But how different does death appear to the pious Christian, and especially to the devout religious who is sustained and consoled by charity! If, when death comes, the parting from those dear to her in life causes her some pang of sorrow, it is more than compensated by the nearness of her reward. Then, more than ever, does she realize that she belongs to God, whose summons she is about to obey; and then the instincts and hopes founded upon charity lead her to cast herself confidently upon the Divine mercy, and look assuredly to her union with God.

I might invite you to proceed to yet a further consideration, and see how charity is inventive, how it seeks ways of proving itself; but you have already sufficient matter for your minds to reflect upon, to satisfy you of the excellence and necessity of charity. Charity is, indeed, termed by the Holy Ghost the fulfilment of the law. It is that holy and sweet law of love under which you must live at all times and in all places, and which will bring joy and peace to your souls all the days of your life.

But charity can never settle down to inaction; it will carry you for God's sake to labour for your neighbour's good. We have fallen upon those times when, because iniquity has abounded, the charity of many has become cold. Hence all the greater necessity of keeping your own fervour alive, by assiduity in all the observances of the religious life; and of an earnest endeavour, within the sphere of your vocation, to do what you can to promote piety in those of whom you have any charge, or who come

within the scope of your influence. A great deal of what we may term worldly love is merely sentiment, and not to be counted upon; but such is not the character of true love of God; it is practical and ever active. Happily, you are not strangers to it; the works carried on by your institute give evident proof of your zeal, begotten of charity. Much of your work may be little noticed, or even known, and yet less spoken of. Instruction is the seed of knowledge; Christian teaching is the seed of faith and piety. Religious who are engaged in imparting secular knowledge are benefactors to mankind: let them supernaturalize their labours so as to sanctify them; let them impart this teaching for the love of God and their neighbour. Religious who instruct children in Christian knowledge are coadjutors of the pastors of the Church. They are, in a sense, ministers of grace; they assist to build up the spiritual edifice; they help to implant in the youthful mind that fund of holy knowledge which points out the path of duty, and is a guide in the way of salvation. What a rich blessing these labours will bring upon those religious who are engaged in them! But are you really devoted to them? Are you zealous in accomplishing them? Let your charity manifest itself in this class of duty. How grand and how far-reaching are its results! They extend beyond the horizon of this world's existence. What scope for your charity! 'I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?' The kindling and feeding and extending of this fire of faith and piety result largely from the religious

instruction and influence under which the youthful mind is brought during the years devoted to education. Join prayer to labour; ask Almighty God to bless your efforts. Leave nothing undone to work successfully in so important a cause.

If there are any other works confided to your care, let holy charity stimulate your zeal and fill you with devotedness in their accomplishment. Your work is not for man, but for God; and where the immediate object of your solicitude does indeed appear to be a fellow-creature, remember that our Lord will take as done to Himself whatever you do, for His sake, to benefit your neighbour. Charity, as I said before, turns everything it touches into gold. How many agencies, alas! there are in the world which are ruinous to souls! What irreligion! what creature love! what immorality! Where are the agencies of good? and what is their energy? Oh, do not hold back in the cause of God and religion! manifest your love and your devotedness. Labour all the more earnestly because the evil agencies are multiplied, and powerful, and labouring with such sad results. Pray for greater charity, that your efforts may be more sanctified, more devoted, and more effectual.

Look upon yourselves as called upon, within the sphere of your holy vocation, to keep alive and spread abroad the fire of Divine charity. You will do this by piety and prayer, by edification, and by fidelity and earnestness in accomplishing the works to which your institute is devoted. St. Paul says: 'Be not weary in well-doing' (2 Thess. iii. 13). The want or

absence of Divine charity in you would not only lead to tepidity and indifference about those obligations which bear immediately upon your own personal sanctification, but would also lead to the neglect of such works as are confided to your solicitude for the spiritual benefit of your neighbour. Be zealous about these works.

Our Lord's command to love Him is a special message to each and every one among you. This message has reached you, and has been repeated again and again. Do not look around to see what others are doing; but let each religious take the message to herself, and ask of our Lord the grace to love Him with all that love which He demands of her own particular heart. Your love will be a response to our Lord's; it will be a pure flame ignited by the fire of His incomprehensible Divine charity. His love speaks to you through the Incarnation, through the Life, Passion and Death of your Saviour, through His Precious Wounds, through His Sacred Heart, through His heavenly doctrine, through the Blessed Sacrament, and through all the channels of grace. You are in astonishment at its immensity and at its condescensions. Your response will, at best, be but feeble; strive, however, that it may be all that it can be. The hymns of the blessed in heaven, if they expressed no love, would not be as sweet music before the throne of God; the love of all our hearts must be as many notes struck, responsive to grace, making chords of tuneful harmony, from land to land, and shore to shore, throughout the world, giving to the Sacred Heart

that praise and homage which our Lord seeks from His Spouse the Church. Our love, then, must be an act of personal worship, and at the same time a contribution to the cumulative homage of all the faithful who comprise the Church of God, the Spouse of the Lamb.

And now once more I say, pray for this inestimable gift of charity ; pray that it may receive further increase in your hearts. Thus will you be more closely united to God ; your actions, perfumed by this sweet scent, will be more pleasing to Him, and your lives will be more meritorious. Moreover, through Divine charity, not only will you be good in yourselves, but you will be enabled to do much good to others, and thus increase your merit.

The fountains of charity are ever open to you in the daily Mass, which you have the happiness to hear, in your frequent Communions, in your religious exercises. The wonder should be, not that you are fervent, but that with such means of sanctification you are not overflowing with Divine charity, and that you are not ever seeking for ways of manifesting it.

What, let me ask, should be its ordinary manifestation in you ? Our Divine Lord has said : ' If you love Me, keep My commandments.' Yes ; and because you love our Lord you will also observe your vows most carefully, you will keep your rules faithfully, you will fulfil your duties assiduously, you will love your vocation ardently, you will sacrifice yourselves willingly, you will bear trials patiently, and, God helping you, you will persevere courage-

ously in the ways of religion and piety. You are now prepared to give this manifestation of your charity; thus will you prove that it is real. All this will indeed be, in your view, but too small a return to make to the Divine Spouse of your souls, who has first loved you; who has given His life for your salvation, and who has called you to so privileged a vocation. But your charity will need stimulating. Go, then, with the Saints to learn lessons of Divine charity in the school of our Lord's most loving Heart and sacred Passion.

To-morrow morning you are to renew your vows. This solemn act will be an earnest of your love of God. You will then profess, as it were, before heaven and earth, that you rejoice in being the servants of God and the spouses of Christ; and your act will signify that you would not on any account whatsoever withdraw anything of your first consecration of yourselves to God. That first consecration was made when you were in your first fervour, and when your young hearts beat warm with the love of God and of your holy calling. Now that you have seen some service in the good cause, now that years are perhaps telling upon you, now that you are perhaps nearer to the close of your religious career than distant from the beginning of it, let your renewal be made with even redoubled fervour, with that fervour with which you would wish to make it if you knew that it was to be the last. With willing hands draw again around you the golden chains of your religious bondage, and give

the key in keeping to our Lord, to hold until your death.

After the renewal of your vows, go on your ways more earnest in the practice of the religious virtues, more faithful to duty, more zealous in doing good, and more patient under your necessary burden of trials; that you may be able to look forward with all the greater confidence to that indescribable reward which God has prepared in His kingdom for those who love Him.

You are going to face once more the trials, labours and temptations of your life and calling; but Divine charity will support you. You know that your love must be proved: God helping you, you will show that it is true. 'Blessed,' says St. James, 'is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him' (i. 12).

CLOSE OF THE RETREAT.

XXIII.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.

'Glory and wealth shall be in his house: and his justice remaineth for ever and ever.'—PSA. cxi. 3.

IT may be said that during these days of recollection and retreat you have sharpened your weapons and refurbished your arms to prepare yourselves to engage once more in the warfare of life. In the light of your obligations you have examined your dispositions and reviewed your conduct. Finally, you have taken good resolutions to help you and steady your future conduct, and you have completed the pious exercises of the retreat by approaching the holy sacrament of penance. You may be sure that, if you have made the retreat well, you have derived from so doing many benefits. It has been intended, in God's dispensations, as a means of correcting your faults, of supplying your omissions, of remedying your neglect, and of renewing your fidelity and fervour. How happy you should be if such results have been obtained! You may now borrow the words of David, saying, in a spirit of gratitude and

confidence, to God who has so blessed you: 'Thy discipline hath corrected me unto the end: and Thy discipline the same shall teach me. . . . Thou hast girded me with strength unto battle' (Psa. xvii. 36, 40). 'Thou hast shown me where correction is needed; be Thou always my teacher; in Thy strength I will renew the conflict.'

Although you are now about to resume your usual avocations—fully resolved to do this with increased devotedness, and more fully impressed with the obligation of attending to your interior perfection and to exterior religiousness—you do not forget that you have not yet parted with the 'old man' that is in you; you are aware that you have still to contend with your natural weaknesses and with a certain tendency towards what is evil. These obstacles to your perfection and to your happiness will continue to harass you. Moreover, you will still have to exert yourselves, and to bear 'the burden of the day and the heats' until that night shall come for you 'when no man can work' (St. John ix. 4). You must therefore be prepared to keep up a continual warfare against your spiritual enemies, and to persevere in your labours. You will, however, mistrust yourselves, and will have constant recourse to God for that help from on high which will fill you with courage and confidence, and which will sustain you until you reach the day of triumph and repose. In this help is your hope: it has not been wanting to you in the past, it will not fail you in the future. Animate yourselves with the sentiments with which David was inspired when he said:

'I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me. My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Behold, He shall neither slumber nor sleep that keepeth Israel. The Lord keepeth thee from all evil: may the Lord keep thy soul. May the Lord keep thy coming in and thy going out, from henceforth now and for ever' (Psa. cxx.).

It is the time now, at the end of your retreat, to strengthen yourselves in the good purposes which occurred to you from time to time during it. These purposes may be summed up as a firm determination to live henceforth faithful to the obligations of your state, and to aim at that holiness of life which, you hope, will bring down the Divine blessing on all you do. Whatever others may do, you are fully resolved, God helping you, not to fall back into a careless or unsatisfactory way of living. 'Stand fast,' St. Paul says, 'and be not held again under the yoke of bondage' (Gal. v. 1). 'Be ye steadfast and immovable: always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not vain in the Lord' (1 Cor. xv. 58). There will still be around you the mists of delusive worldliness, and you may have to breathe the infectious atmosphere of disedifying behaviour; and there will lie in various directions carefully concealed but perhaps fatal pitfalls, and the misguiding tracks of unsafe counsel; while restless 'self,' resisting the goad of a wise discipline, may weary you with its struggles and importunities; and the predominant failing may seek to bring you again to follow its leading in the downward way. Will you

allow yourselves to be deceived or to be led astray from the holy path upon which you have now entered so fervently? No; you are thankful to God for the graces which have been bestowed upon you during the retreat; you have felt the desire to correct your faults, and to be more observant in the future; and now, full of courage and renewed in fervour, you are determined, with the help of God's grace, to give effect to your desire.

Be resolved, then, not to make any compromise with indifference, cowardice, or sluggishness. Take counsel in all you do with Wisdom, and not with the dictates of nature, or of the world, or of disedifying religious. What does Wisdom teach you? She invites you to walk with all circumspection in the fear of God, in the practice of all goodness, in discipline, and in self-denial; holding in horror all evil, malice, folly, envy, jealousy, and contention, and living in peace with God and with all men. Such are the lessons which are found in the inspired writings. Consider, too, what are the teachings and advice of spiritual writers. Are they not always on the side of virtue, piety, and observance? What, again, are the admirable lessons and prescriptions of your holy rule? Are not these also exhortations and directions in the science of interior and exterior perfection? Reflect well upon all this body of holy teaching which is set before you, and ask yourselves seriously if you can put yourselves in opposition to it, or if you can disregard it without folly and danger. Ah, no! it is as a light and a voice from God, inviting you to walk as wise, and not as unwise, religious in

the path of your beautiful vocation. 'See, therefore, brethren,' St. Paul says, 'how you walk circumspectly; not as unwise, but as wise: redeeming the time, because the days are evil' (Eph. v. 15, 16). Again, I say, take counsel in all you do with Wisdom: other counsellors will misdirect you.

Of whom does the Psalmist say, 'Glory and wealth shall be in his house; and his justice remaineth for ever and ever'? He says it of the servant of God who is instructed by Wisdom, of 'the man that feareth the Lord,' and who 'shall delight exceedingly in His commandments' (Psa. cxi. 1). This is the description which the Psalmist gives of the truly wise man; such a man fears God, and Solomon says: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. ix. 10); such a man loves to obey God, and to him the yoke of the commandments is not disagreeable but sweet. The Holy Ghost declares such a man 'Blessed.' The description applies equally to a good religious, and the blessing and the reward pronounced by the Holy Ghost shall therefore be hers.

What a consolation it should be for you, while you are wisely striving to accomplish all your duties and to walk in the way of perfection, to know that this conduct is pleasing to God and a source of great merit to you! 'Glory and wealth shall be in his house.' How happy it should make you, if you are good religious, to reflect that, by God's favour and bountiful dispensation, and in view of our Lord's infinite merits, your actions, offered to God, will be rewarded in this life by countless graces and bless-

ings, and will cause an accumulation of merits for a heavenly and eternal reward in the life to come. You add to these merits by every work which you render pleasing to God; so day by day you lay by in the unseen storehouse a rich treasure—'a treasure in heaven which faileth not' (St. Luke xii. 33)—which shall, in God's good time, be exchanged for a most ample reward. You may be poor and weak, humble and of no account, deficient in worldly knowledge and unheeded by society; but you will not be wanting in wisdom nor be without its desirable fruits, if, walking in holy fear, you strive to please God by a fervent religious life and by assiduity in devoting yourselves to the works of your holy institute. Treading thus in the footsteps of the Saints, you will merit much in God's sight, and you will earn for yourselves the heavenly reward: 'Glory and wealth shall be in his house.'

It should be to you a source of further consolation to feel that God will preserve you in His holy service, that He will maintain you in His grace. The Holy Ghost says of the devout servant of God: 'His justice remaineth for ever and ever.' Left to yourselves you might indeed be overcome and fall away, for great and good men have, before now, fallen away; they forsook the paths of wisdom. You, however, are resolved to persevere in those paths, and you look to God for His help to maintain you in them. He will not disappoint you, for, as St. Paul says, 'it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will' (Phil. ii. 13).

That the way of the good religious is the way which you should consider the desirable one for you to pursue, and to remain steadfast in, is a point not open to controversy. The more your wisdom has with time become mature, from observation, knowledge and experience, the stronger has your conviction upon this point become. You have desired this way for others as well as for yourselves, particularly when others, by their irreligious conduct, have disedified you, or caused you alarm or misgiving. You saw what was wanting in their case, see that it be not wanting in your own case.

If it is so certain that the way of the good religious is the desirable way, how shall we explain why many religious depart from it? No doubt various reasons will suggest themselves to you; I will treat of three which may be termed ordinary ones, and I will say that religious depart from the way of regular observance and piety because they do not duly appreciate it, or because of neglect, or again because of sloth.

In the first place religious are to be met with who do not value religious life for its own sake, nor for the special good which dutifulness in it would bring to them. In their case there is deficient the very groundwork necessary for stability; what wonder, then, if they fall away from fervour, and disedify by breaches of discipline! They need to pray in the words of David: 'Teach me goodness and discipline and knowledge' (Psa. cxviii. 66), three essentials of a devout and meritorious life. Some religious of this class would almost appear to think that if they

make some little attempt to keep their rule, they therefore place their superiors under an obligation to them. Has it not perhaps occurred that superiors have even had to use coaxing and promises in order to induce religious of this class to assist at the religious exercises. How humiliating for any institute in which love of the religious life and observance should have ebbed away to so low a level! Retribution from heaven would surely follow such a falling away if it were to become general. Woe to the wreckers of the beautiful fabric put together by saintly servants of God, blessed from on high, and approved by ecclesiastical authority! Servants of God built it up; be persuaded that it will not be servants of God who pull it down. I will tell you who they will be who will engage in the sacrilegious attempt; they will be religious of undisciplined lives and ill-regulated consciences, conceited in their own erroneous notions, unwilling to receive correction, seekers of the praise and support of seculars. From all such religious, if they are not speedily converted by true sorrow and amendment, may every institute be happily delivered! As to yourselves, strive to walk in all humility; ask our Lord to give you a due appreciation of the religious life and its blessings, and to preserve you in fervour, for 'His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire' (St. Matt. iii. 12).

We attribute, in the second place, to neglect, the falling away of religious from their fervour. It is

noticeable how soon after their retreat some religious begin to be remiss in their exercises, and in fulfilling their other obligations; their affection for observance lessens and gradually dies away, and this is the result of neglect. You should, after your retreat, keep yourselves to an exact observance until a habit of it is formed; and this observance should be maintained not only in the exterior, but also with pious dutifulness. If the remiss conduct of any religious should give rise to a fear that piety is unreal, or that it is diminishing in the community, take care not to give countenance to such neglect by your own want of piety and observance.

There is also a neglect of another kind, the neglect of precautions. There have been religious who, shortly after their retreat, began to relax their strictness in avoiding the known causes or dangerous occasions of their faults and falls. While the strictness was maintained, happy and consoling results followed from it; but when it was relaxed, they became unguarded, and even rash, and they attributed this to their being less scrupulous. Soon, however, they gave away to regrettable failings which they had considered themselves done with for ever. What should your conduct be? You should, after your retreat, consider it unpardonable to expose yourselves unnecessarily, under any pretext, to your previous falls, and you should exercise uncompromising discipline in guarding yourselves against them.

A third kind of neglect is the neglect of self-denial. You must be persuaded that you cannot be good religious without the practice of self-denial. You

have to exercise it in correcting and restraining your appetites, your self-love, your desire of amusement, your tendency to dissipation, your love of independence, your own will; but if you fail to do so, every kind of religious irregularity may creep in and carry you away from your duty, with the sad result of detriment to piety, fervour, and merit. You should therefore be on your guard against remissness in practising self-denial. You should, after your retreat, prove yourselves more attached to the interior life, more anxious to draw fruit from religious observance, and from the pious exercises enjoined by your rule, fidelity to which cannot but demand some proper planning of your time, some foregoing of promised pleasures, some sacrifice of your convenience, and some interference with your various occupations which are not to the purpose.

In the third place, we find the falling away of religious from fervour after their retreat attributable in some cases to sloth. You have, therefore, to be upon your guard against idleness, inactivity, shirking labour, and taking needless rest; these faults are utterly incompatible with religious fervour and devotedness. Beware also of indulging that feeling of monotony which, by taking your heart off your work, leads to weariness and discontent, and to a desire of change. Do you ever hear religious say: 'It is always the same thing; what a tie it is to be always following the same regulation! what a perfect slavery to be always obliged to attend the community exercises'? There is another monotony of which these religious never seem to tire—I mean the

service of the body. You never hear them declaring that it is monotonous to sit down to their meals three times a day, to take their repose, or to attend in other ways to the needs of the body and the relaxation of the mind. No, the monotony which is declared intolerable is that holy discipline which helps to sanctify the soul and bring it nearer to God. No one pretends that such a discipline is not at first, and even perhaps at all times, trying to nature; but by the aid of grace, bountifully bestowed, you can subject yourselves to it not only by compulsion —as being a matter of duty—but even willingly as to a useful discipline which you prize and desire. Grace will make the yoke sweet and the burden light. After your retreat you should be eager to subject the body to the soul, the flesh to the spirit, nature to grace; you should, therefore, gradually but effectually bring your perhaps stubborn neck to bend to the wholesome yoke of duty and piety, until religiousness shall become as a second nature, when its requirements will command your ready and devout compliance.

You easily recognise what a perversity that is which leads men to love foolishness rather than wisdom, darkness rather than light, doubt and error rather than truth, the things of sense rather than those of the spirit, the body which perishes rather than the soul which is immortal; which leads them to see a greater attraction in the creature than in the Divine Creator; which causes them to follow the ways of vice rather than those of virtue, the guidance of nature rather than that of grace, and

which makes them turn their minds more readily to earthly satisfaction than to the promised heavenly rewards. You easily recognise what a perversity that is, I say finally, which makes men select the broad road of sin, waywardness, worldliness, selfishness, and sloth, leading to destruction, rather than the narrow road of piety, duty, and perfection leading to eternal life. Well, it is a perversity of the same order, though of a less pronounced kind—but a perversity all the while—which causes religious, consecrated to God and bound to tend to perfection, to lead a remiss life of neglect, imperfection, and non-observance, rather than a life devoted to a loyal and generous compliance with all the obligations of their holy calling.

Let me now sum up these final considerations suggested at the close of the retreat by a retrospective glance at what has been said during it, and by a prospective glance towards the difficulties and the hopes and fears of your future life. You have seen that you must not fall back, but persevere; that Wisdom counsels you to walk in the way of religious dutifulness; that the servant of God who follows that path is wise, and is happy and blessed; and that it is a path of conduct which recommends itself to you, and to all who are earnestly religious. You considered finally the obstacles to your pursuing that path or the causes of departure from it, namely, want of due appreciation of its excellence and advantages, also neglect and sloth.

With such lessons before you, and impressed as you now are by a desire of profiting by them, shall

it come to pass that you will not heed them? Will you, through half-heartedness or indifference, allow yourselves to fall again under the bondage of your imperfections? To enjoy the sweetness of God's intimate friendship and the holy liberty of His children, it is necessary that you should not only keep your conscience free from grievous sin, but that you should also strive to avoid every kind of sin; your endeavour should be to fulfil as perfectly as possible the precept of loving God with your whole heart, and therefore to spend your lives in piety and dutifulness in that holy sphere of work to which you have been called. Let such be your firm determination. You need the grace to accomplish it; you are fully convinced that God will not deny this grace. Ask it, in the first place, of the Sacred Heart: 'O Sacred Heart of Jesus, object of our tenderest devotion, grant us out of the rich treasury of Thy bounties, and in the full measure of our many needs, help and grace to spend well and religiously the days or years that remain to us in life. Inflame our hearts with a sincere desire of God's glory, and of our own sanctification. Draw us closer to Thee in the ways of piety, inspire us with zeal, and bless our lives, our communities, and our works.'

Ask this grace, in the next place, through the intercession of Mary, your Immaculate Queen and Mother: 'O Mary, Immaculate Mother of God, we cast ourselves once more at your feet with our needs and our anxieties. We have not lived as we should, nor laboured as we ought. Knowing our weakness and our unworthiness, we beseech you to obtain

for us by your powerful intercession, the grace to continue in piety, fidelity, and zeal, that our lives may be pleasing to God, to whom we have consecrated them, and to you, under whose protection we have placed them.'

Let religious life be henceforth amongst you what it should be, and strive to maintain it in all its vigour. Then will you respect and esteem one another; then will the faithful hold you in honour; then will the Church be edified; then will your labours be fruitful in good and in merit; then may you be filled with confidence that your end will be in peace and your reward in everlasting glory. 'The just shall be in everlasting remembrance: he shall not fear the evil hearing . . . his justice remaineth for ever and ever: his horn shall be exalted in glory' (Psa. cxi. 7, 9). Happily, you are fully resolved so to direct your lives that you may continue to enjoy the consolation with which the hope of the realisation of these Divine promises in your case now fills you. May God keep you so resolved; and may His grace ever aid you, and lead you onward to this realisation! With this prayer I conclude these exhortations, using the words of St. Paul: 'Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would make you worthy of His vocation . . . that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Thess. i. 11, 12).

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